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ABC

organic GARDENER

ISSUE 156 $8.99

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+ TOP BUSHFOODS
TO PLANT

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Autumn essentials!

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WHAT TO PLANT & WARMING RECIPES

plus

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- GROW HERBAL TEAS & SAVE
- FROGS GO TO TOWN
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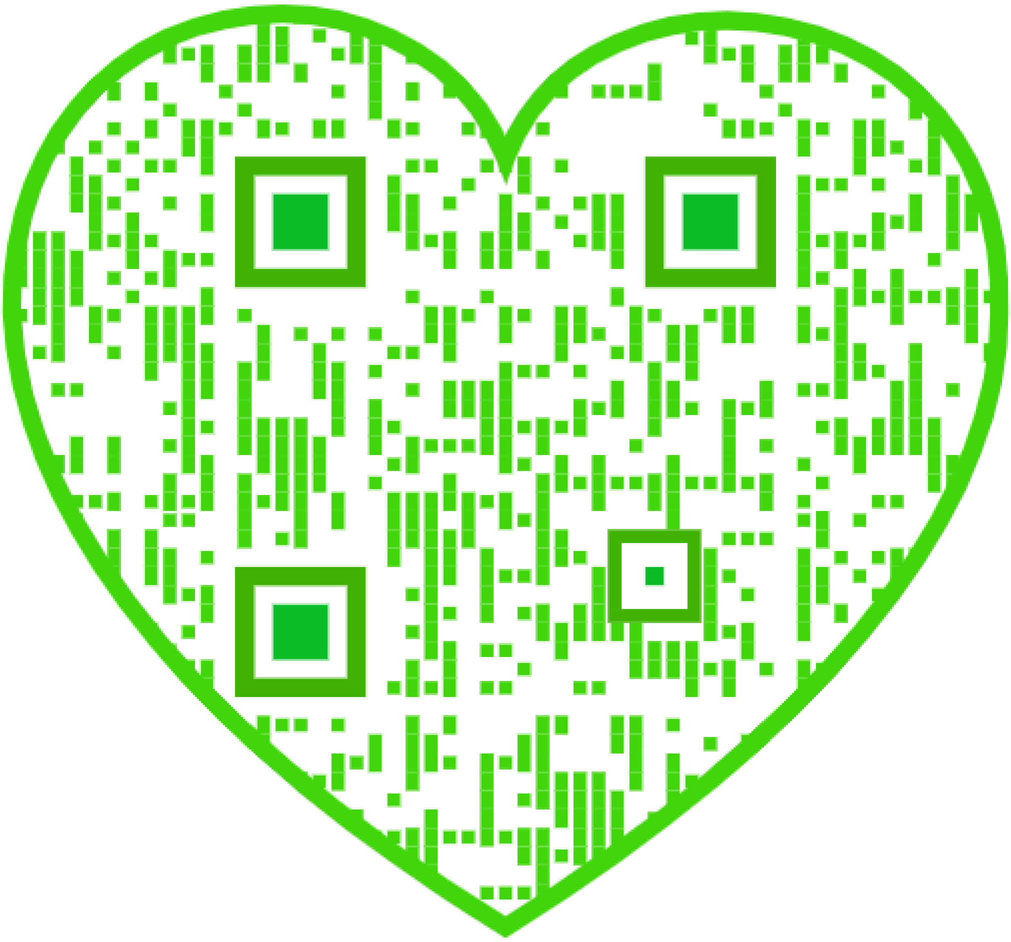

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> "Start with this principle:
> don't face your fears alone,"
> Monbiot wrote.

Create our own backup

Last issue (OG 155) Dr Reese Halter wrote about the true and "dire situation" of the planet and the climate crisis that is causing so much anxiety for people around the world. Halter also talked about how our governments had effectively abandoned meaningful action and a liveable planet for future generations.

In a recent *The Guardian* Australia article (February 18), the environmental and social change commentator George Monbiot took up a similar theme in a story about how President Trump could trigger global collapse and the best way to counter that.

Monbiot said every government should be hoping for the best and preparing for the worst in the face of so many threats to global stability, our ecosystems and cooperative society but alas, as they do with climate and ecological breakdown, the possibility of food system collapse, and more, most governments now seem to just hope for the best. Monbiot wrote, as did Halter, that it is now up to us to create our own backup systems.

"Start with this principle: don't face your fears alone," Monbiot wrote. "Make friends, meet your neighbours, set up support networks, help those who are struggling. Since the dawn of humankind, those with robust social networks have been more resilient than those without."

It rings true but it does take energy and motivation to break out of our dependence on governments and start creating new local systems that will be resilient to the challenges ahead. Sometimes, though, simple initiatives can go a long way.

We often have news items in ABC *Organic Gardener* about edible food trails – locals who have joined together to open their gardens for a weekend so people can come and learn, get inspired and start their own food gardens (see 'Matters' on page 10 for details of the upcoming NSW Central Coast Edible Garden Trail). One example of how local networks can support each other.

Growing as much of our own food as we can (as we regularly harp on about in these pages) is perhaps the number one way of extricating ourselves from the industrial food supply system that is mostly controlled by mammoth companies. Next best is going to farmers' markets or harvesting and foraging for free food going to waste.

McHaley Ho enjoyed her time as a WWOOFer. See page 74.

PHOTO RIGHT: WWOOF AUSTRALIA

If you are new to gardening and looking for inspiration, one way to get experience is through the WWOOF (Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms) program, which allows people to stay on farms and work for 4–6 hours a day for food and accommodation. You can learn the skills of organic farming and gardening from experienced practitioners and take that knowledge into your own life. See our story by Simon Webster on page 74.

Also this issue, along with our practical food growing articles, have a peek at our Show us Your Shed competition winners – there were some amazing entries that made me want to get out and build my own.

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for a greener life

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Contents

MARCH–APRIL 2025

on the cover

16 Fruit trees for seasonal colour
18 Grow broad beans: a hearty staple
24 Pumpkins: when to pick & how to store, plus save seed for next year!
32 Show Us Your Shed: winners revealed
36 Indigenous nurseries + top bushfoods to plant
46 Frogs go to town
62 Harvest: warming recipes
71 Hemp wonder products
80 Grow herbal teas & save

organic gardening

16 PLANT: FRUITS OF THE SEASON
Connie Cao selects three fruit trees that will add fruit and autumn colour to your garden.

18 GROW: BROAD BEAN BOUNTY
Jian Liu loves growing and eating broad beans – a highly nutritious mainstay winter crop. Here are her top tips.

24 GROW: THE GREAT PUMPKIN HARVEST
With this advice from Phil Dudman you'll be ready to make the most of this year's pumpkin crop, as well as plan your planting for next season.

32 SHOW US YOUR SHED: WINNERS REVEALED!

36 ORGANIC LIVING: GROWING TOGETHER
Jacqueline Forster visits two First Nations-owned social enterprises that grow and sell traditional bushfoods, fostering greater awareness of culture and Country.

46 NATURE: FROGS IN THE CITY
Karen Sutherland explores how frogs move about, and some of the conservation projects helping them thrive.

50 NATURAL DESIGN: BRING IN THE GREENERY
A new book by Lauren Camilleri and Sophia Kaplan profiles homes and buildings from around the world that bring plants and gardens to the forefront of design.

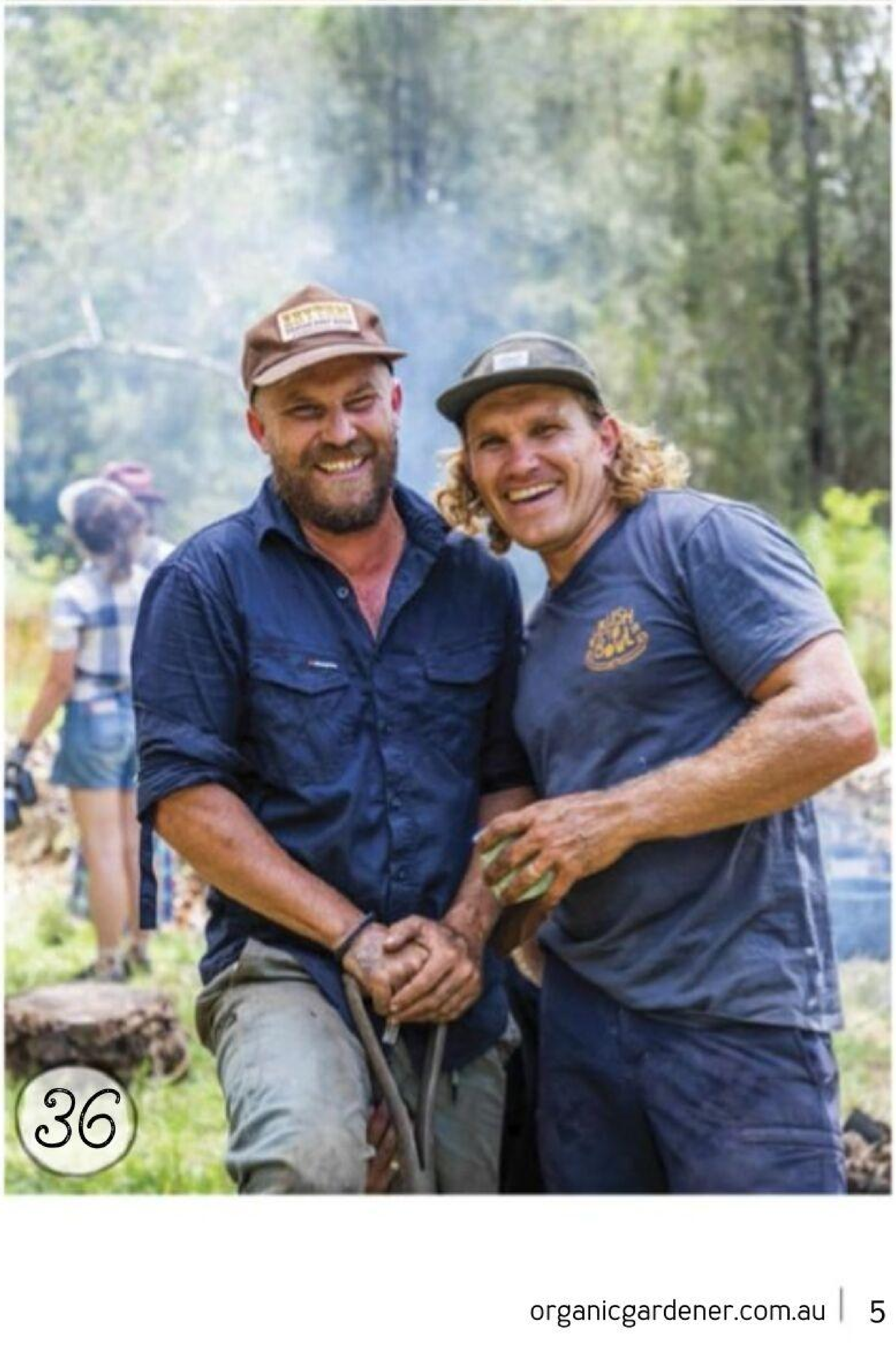
53 ACTION: COOL OPERATORS
Our experts provide planting ideas, pest advice and practical tips for the cool season garden.

Our cover

Autumn colour is one of the joys of a cool season patch and this issue is filled with growing ideas to have just that, including a pumpkin harvest similar to this one from the garden (and camera) of Annemarie Bolduc.

organic
GARDENER
Pumpkins
Autumn essentials!

16


36

COVER PHOTO: ANNEMARIE BOLDUC @BOTTLE&BRUSHSTUDIO/FROM TOP: CONNIE CAO/BUSH TO BOWL

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1 OF 25
PEST CONTROL
PACKS FROM
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Protectants
Head to page 58

organic living

62 HARVEST: A GARDEN TO NOURISH
Be inspired by the recipes in a new book that celebrates the history of John and Sunday Reed's property, Heide.

71 ORGANIC LIVING: HEALTH BOOSTING HEMP
Jessamy Miller explores the rise of hemp products and their many benefits, now backed by research.

74 ORGANIC LIFE: READY AND WILLING
The international WWOOF program has been life-changing for many travellers, writes Simon Webster.

80 HERBAL TEAS: A BEAUTIFUL BREW
Helen Cushing loves making herbal teas that are fresh and vibrant from the garden. Here are her favourites.

84 GARDENING COMMUNITY: PODCASTS YOU'LL DIG
Phil Dudman explores top Aussie gardening podcasts that provide gardening tips, personal stories and more.

86 CHOOK LOVERS: SKATEBOARDS AND FEATHERS
Celebrity chook lady Elaine Janes shares her secret to connecting with chooks, writes Steve Payne.

87 POULTRY: PESKY POULTRY WORMS
It can be hard to get the facts about intestinal worms and the right treatment for backyard poultry. Jessamy Miller sets the record straight on what to do.

90 LOSING THE PLOT: CUCUMBER TRAUMA
Simon Webster has grown a bumper crop of cucumbers, but can he get anyone to eat them?

regulars

3 EDITOR'S LETTER
8 MAIL: Reader questions and thoughts
10 NEWS: The latest news and events
12 MARKET: Natural choices for you and your garden
14 REVIEWS: Books that caught our attention
60 ABC Yours for gardening

ABC *Organic Gardener* magazine acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and traditional custodians of the lands where we live and work.

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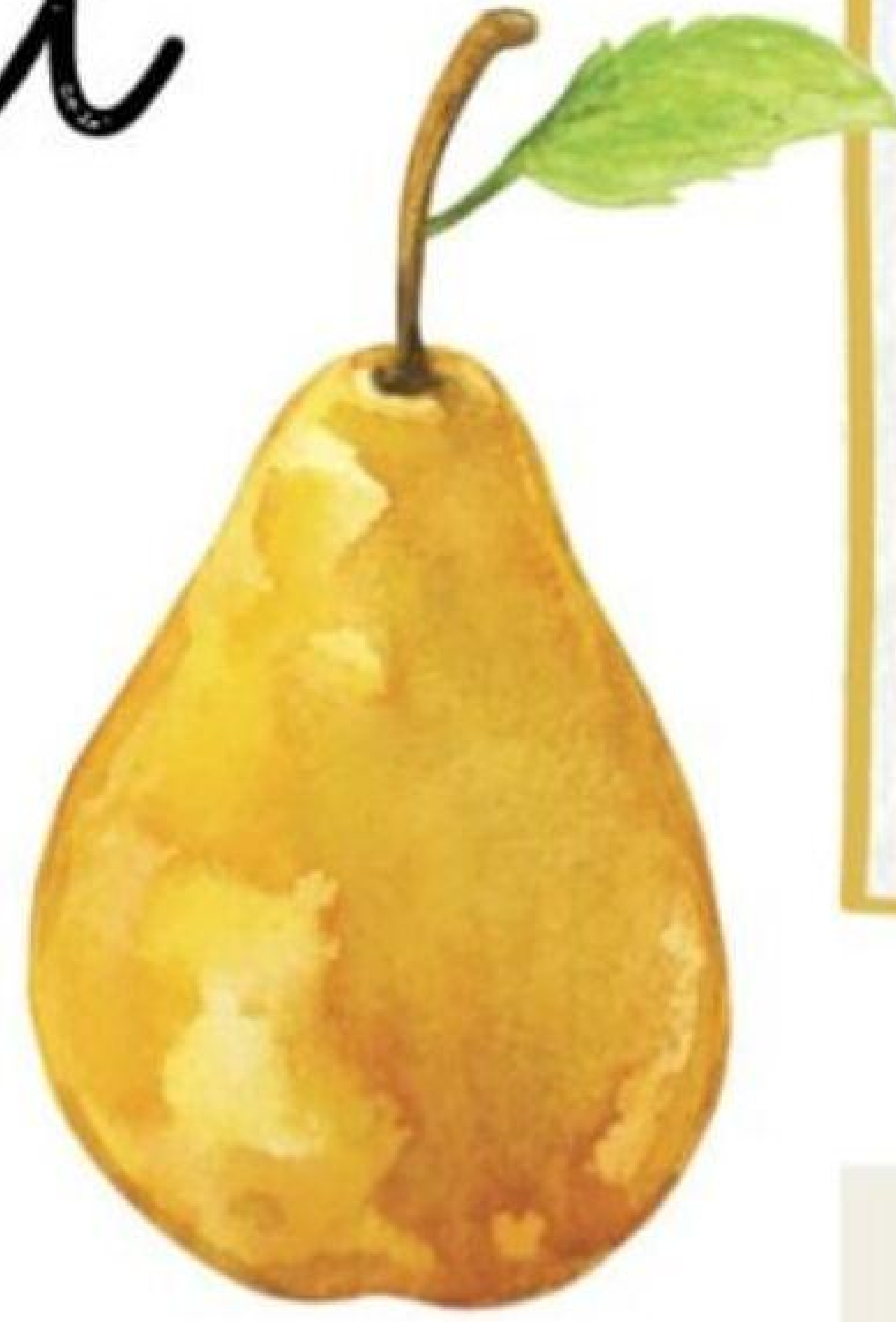

GET IN TOUCH

Please include your town/suburb. Photos are also helpful, and any details such as climate and soil. The more information we have the better.

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PEARS THAT DON'T RIPEN

I rarely buy pears from the shops as they are usually rock hard and tasteless. However, I recently bought some having seen a nice tart recipe that used them. Those pears sat in the fruit bowl for over a month before I got around to making that tart.

Then, one day, I noticed that they were no longer green but had turned yellow, and got them ready for cooking. They were delicious.

In all those years of not buying pears, I had not realised that I had to wait for them to ripen; but I was astonished that it took a month. Apparently, I had never waited long enough. However, I've read that had they been picked at the correct time, they should have been ready in about 10 days.

I decided to buy some more and waited for them to ripen. They never did. One became a pale yellow, but not before it had started to shrivel and it was still not properly ripe. Its taste was barely tolerable. All of this suggests to me that farmers are picking them too soon.
Joyce Edmonds

Hi Joyce,
Thank you for your pear observations. Ripening time for pears can be a bit variable depending on temperature and whether you have other fruit, especially bananas or apples, in your fruit bowl. They give out more of the natural gas ethylene than most other fruits. Ethylene causes fruit to ripen.

My favourite pears are Beurré Bosc, and when I have finished my own crop, these are what I buy to eat. They all generally ripen within 10 days and I've never had one that doesn't ripen. I like my pears crisp, so tend to eat them a bit sooner than other people do.

But to answer your question, pears that are picked too early will never ripen, they just shrivel. So yes, there must be growers who are picking their fruit too early. Try buying pears from a market or green grocer and put them in a bowl with apples and or bananas and see if this makes a difference.
Penny Woodward

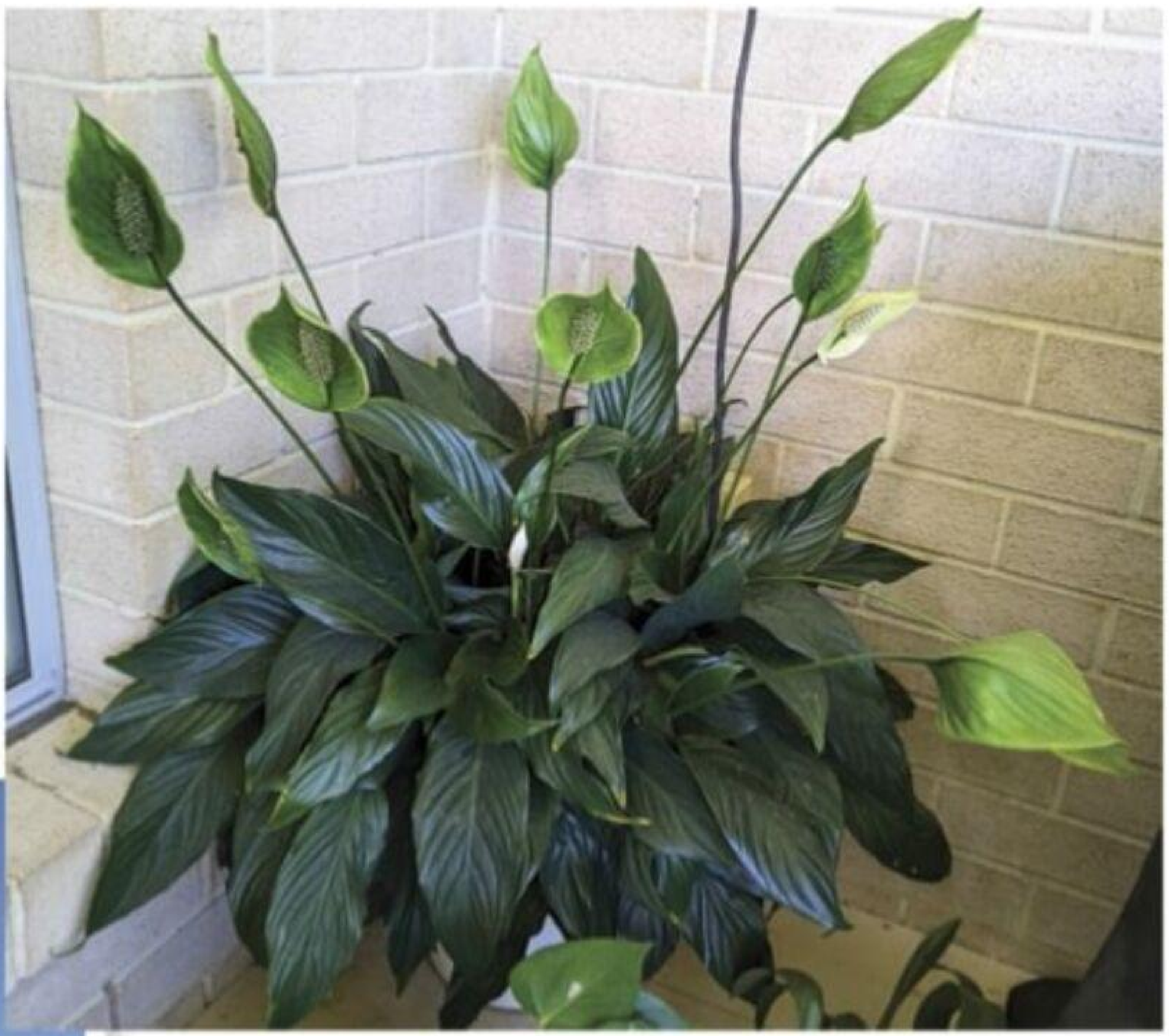
FROM LAWN TO ABUNDANCE

I won the beautiful ABC *Organic Gardener* 2025 Diary and Calendar and I wanted to say a big THANK YOU!

I was delighted to win, and it was an amazing surprise.

I thought I would attach a couple of photos of our garden – it was bare lawn when we started and in two years we have turned a totally empty space into a happy organic supply of fruit and vegies. It's only 200sqm and feeds us (and a lot of our neighbours) year-round. Wishing you a wonderful 2025.
Nicki Raymond, Melbourne (Vic)

Nicki's garden has gone from bare lawn to a lush organic garden, filled with fruit and vegetables.



GREEN PEACE LILY FLOWERS

I have a question about my peace lilies. As you can see from the photo, they are large plants that are flowering with abundance. I live in Caloundra and keep these on my patio. I usually have issues with caterpillars eating all the leaves and flowers, which so far has not happened. My question is about the green flowers. I have never had this happen before and would like to know what caused it and if I can do something next time to encourage white flowers. I do give them a slow-release fertiliser, which I know helps them bloom.

Could I have over-fertilised them this year, or maybe due to too much light or watering? I moved from Melbourne to Queensland three years ago and would never have grown lilies in pots on the verandah.

Angela Bauer, Caloundra (Qld)

Dear Angela,

There are a few reasons why the spathes on your peace lilies are turning green instead of the crisp white we love. But first, a quick dive into spathe science. The spathe is a modified leaf that surrounds the spadix (the short, flower-filled spike). Being leaf-like structures, spathes can photosynthesise, meaning they produce chlorophyll and turn green. This often happens naturally as part of their life cycle as they age – they're just squeezing in a little photosynthesis before they fade to brown.

Light may also be a factor: while peace lilies love bright, indirect light, too much light (or reflection from nearby white surfaces, like your patio bricks) can ramp up chlorophyll production, greening the spathes. Try moving them to a slightly shadier spot.

Fertiliser might also be playing a role. Over-fertilising encourages vegetative growth, which can include the greening of spathes. Cut back your slow-release fertiliser or dilute your liquid fertiliser to see if it helps.

Phil Dudman

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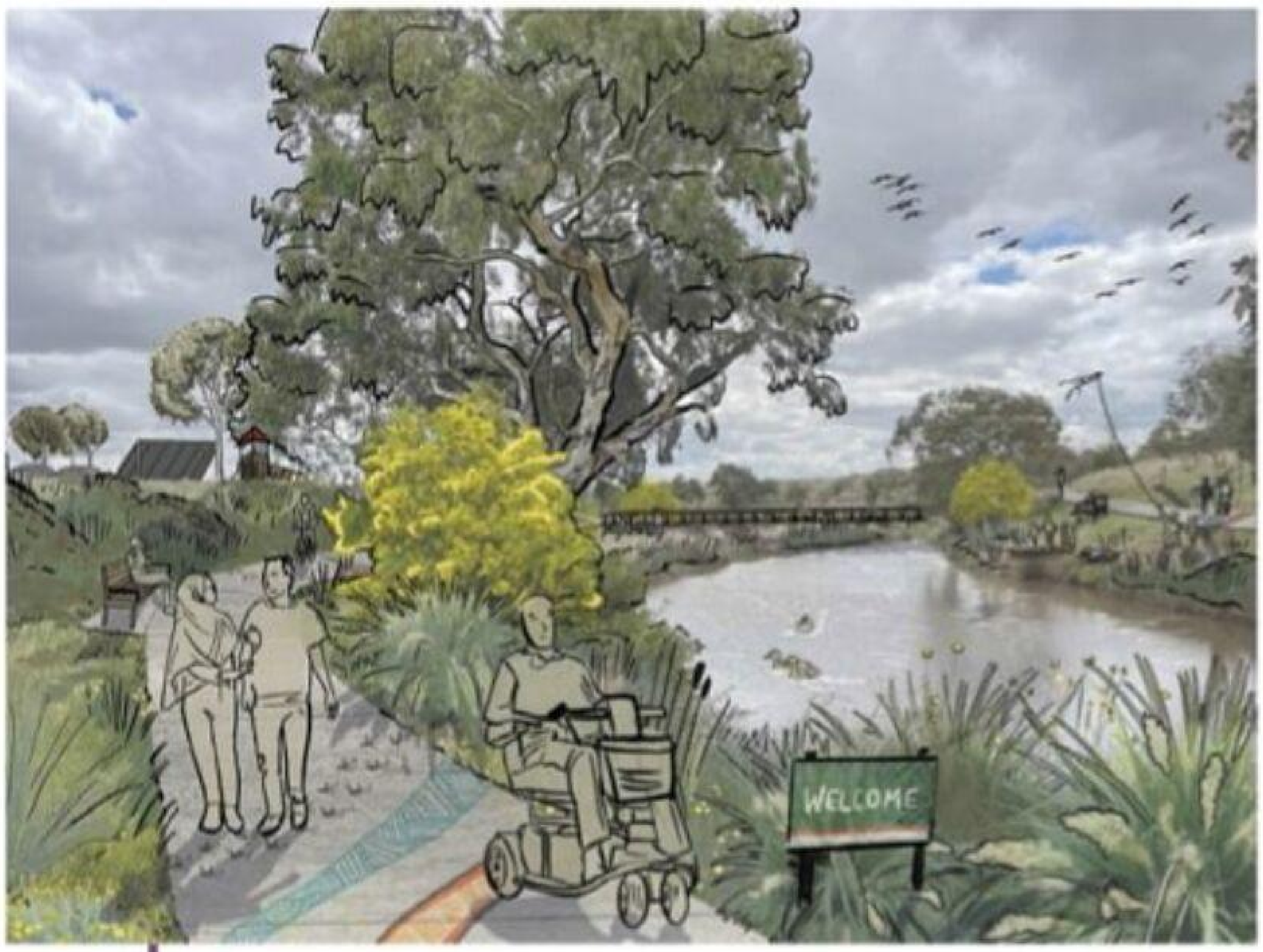


New habitat to protect frogs

A new park that is to be created in Deanside, Melbourne, on Wurundjeri Country, will help protect natural temperate grasslands and provide important habitat for the growling grass frog (see story on page 46).

The 215-hectare Kororoit Creek Regional Park is part of the Victorian Government's $315 million Suburban Parks Program, which is set to create more than 6500 hectares of new and upgraded parks and trails across greater Melbourne, increasing green spaces, biodiversity and urban wildlife refuges.

Parks Victoria says there will also be a 45-hectare conservation area beside the park, providing 260 hectares in total of new green space.

More information: parks.vic.gov.au/projects/melbourne-region

Gardening inspiration on show

The Melbourne International Flower & Garden Show will be abuzz with more than 100,000 visitors expected over its five days, starting March 26. Get tickets online to avoid queues or disappointment. ABC *Organic Gardener* magazine will be part of an exciting new space at the show, sharing with *Gardening Australia* TV who will have a number of special activities planned with hosts from the show. Best part? When you subscribe or renew your subscription at the show, you'll get a bonus goodie bag filled with garden and organic living goodness. Get ready to be inspired by stunning expert-designed display gardens, as well as more modest but still inspiring 'achievable gardens'. Add to this educational talks, plant and garden gear sellers, food, entertainment, and much more. It's not to be missed.

When: March 26–30
Where: Carlton Gardens, Melbourne, Vic
Details and cost: melbflowershow.com.au

Edible Garden Trail

Follow the Central Coast Edible Garden Trail

Permaculture is the theme of the third NSW Central Coast Edible Garden Trail, to be held over the first weekend of May and showcasing around 30 gardens. Visitors can see permaculture systems and designs in practise, speak directly with the gardeners who created them, and get firsthand knowledge and wisdom from people who have been living a permaculture life. The focus will be on growing food organically and connecting with local communities. International Permaculture Day will be celebrated during the trail on May 4.

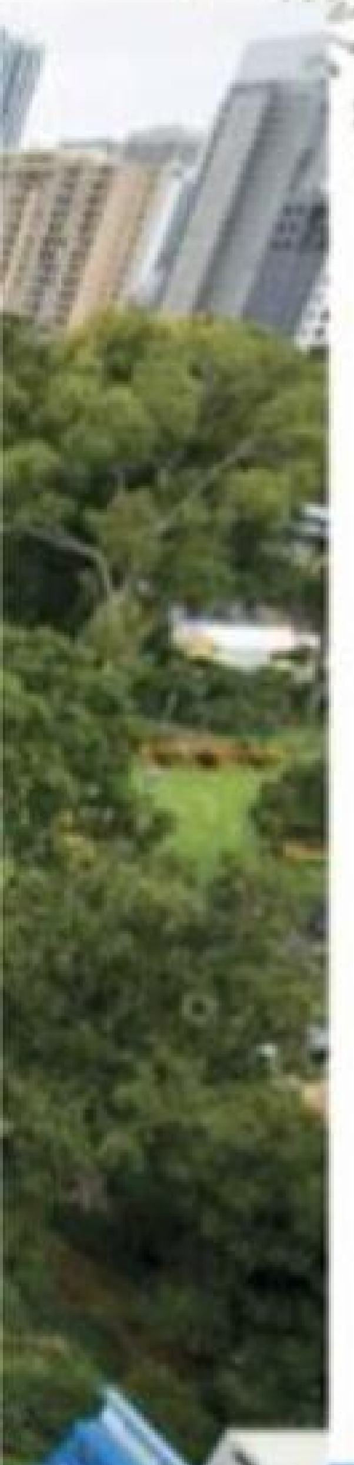
When: May 3–4, 9.30am–4pm
Where: Various gardens on NSW Central Coast
Details and cost: centralcoastediblegardentrail.org.au

PHOTOS: PARKS VICTORIA/ MIFGS/ EDIBLE GARDEN TRAIL, LISA HAYMES

Celebrating 50 years of the joys of growing herbs

The Queensland Herb Society's annual festival is celebrating it's 50th anniversary this year with special events and activities. For a bit of fun, there will be a 1970s dress theme for all visitors. The free event includes talks and demonstrations, a huge range of medicinal and culinary plants, fruit trees, garden and herb focused stalls with products such as soaps, bread, handmade fibres, cosmetics, perfumes and bush foods.

When: May 25, 9am–3pm
Where: Albion Peace Centre, 102 McDonald Road, Windsor, Brisbane
Details: facebook.com/qldherbsociety



Building a sustainable future

Sustainable House Day this year will focus on retrofits and renovations that make homes more energy efficient and comfortable. Learn from others' experience as you visit inspiring homes and gain insights from designers, builders and owners. The event has been running for 20 years and is now coordinated by Renew, a national, not-for-profit organisation that advocates for people to live sustainably.

When: May 4
Where: Nationwide
Details: sustainablehouseday.com

PHOTO: PETER HOARE/ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCK

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Grow your own pepperberries

Another natural flavour to grow in your patch is the Tasmanian pepperberry, available from Woodbridge Fruit Trees. The berries from this native plant can be used as a black pepper substitute when dried. The red stems, dark green leaves and white summer flowers also add colour. **Visit: woodbridgefruittrees.com.au, $23.**

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ILLUSTRATIONS: ISTOCK

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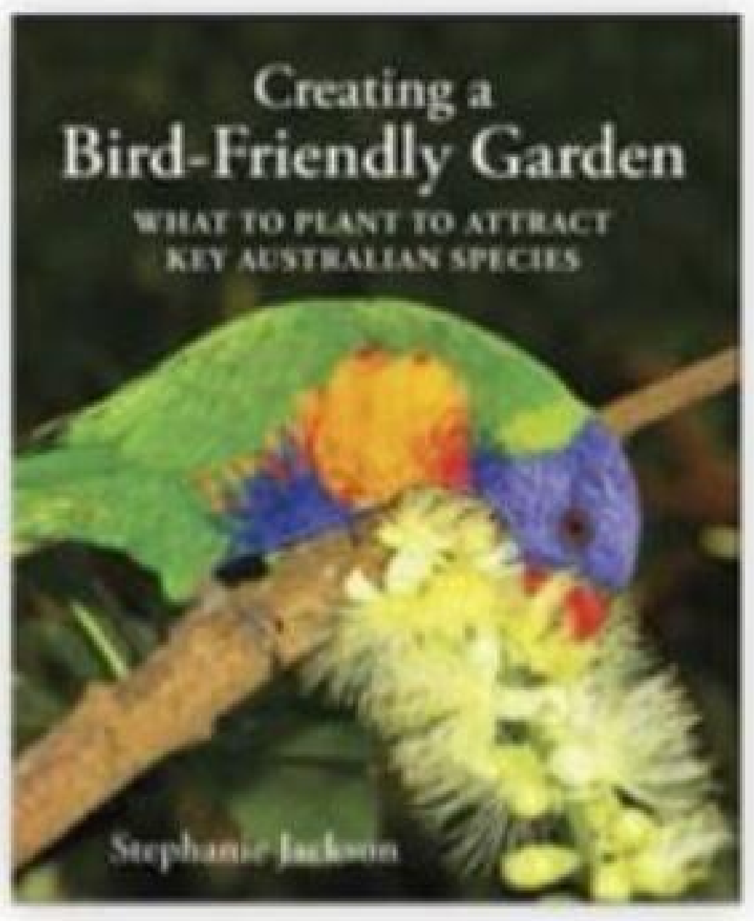
Great reads that will challenge and inspire.

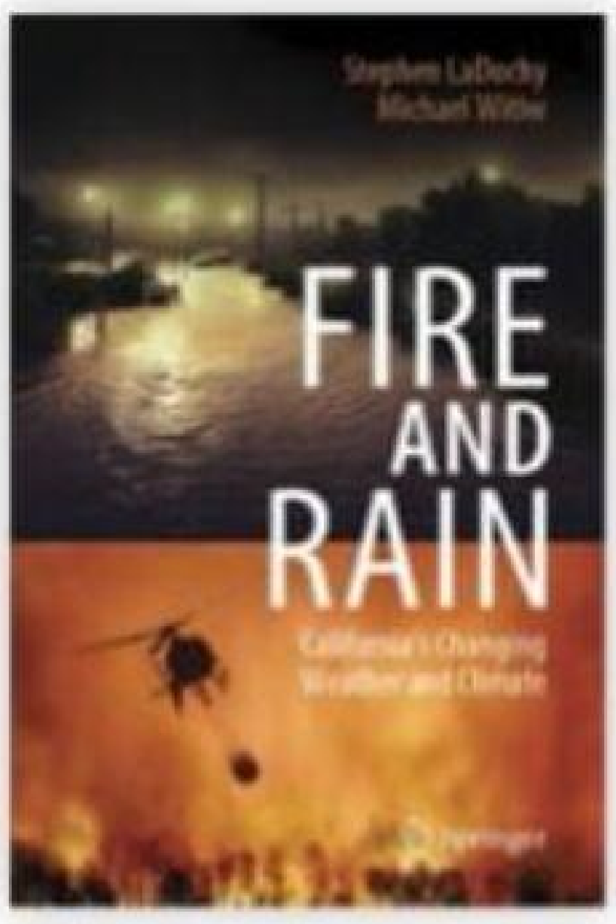

Creating a Bird-Friendly Garden
WHAT TO PLANT TO ATTRACT KEY AUSTRALIAN SPECIES
Stephanie Jackson

CREATING A BIRD-FRIENDLY GARDEN

Stephanie Jackson
REED NEW HOLLAND, 2024

Drawing on a lifelong love of birds and plants, Stephanie Jackson's *Creating a Bird-friendly Garden* is a comprehensive guide to creating a backyard sanctuary for birds. Jackson's lyrical writing illustrates an array of ways to support Australian birds, be it in a sprawling backyard, or on an apartment balcony. Chapters on garden planning, providing water and nesting materials, feeding wild birds, and on forming a bird-friendly neighbourhood, coach readers on how to turn a backyard or outdoor area into a bird paradise. Also included is a plant directory (both native and exotic species are included), complete with growing zones and photographs, and a detailed field guide to the 50 bird species we are most likely to attract to our gardens. Among the most common ones you may encounter are robins, finches and honeyeaters.

Georgia Angus

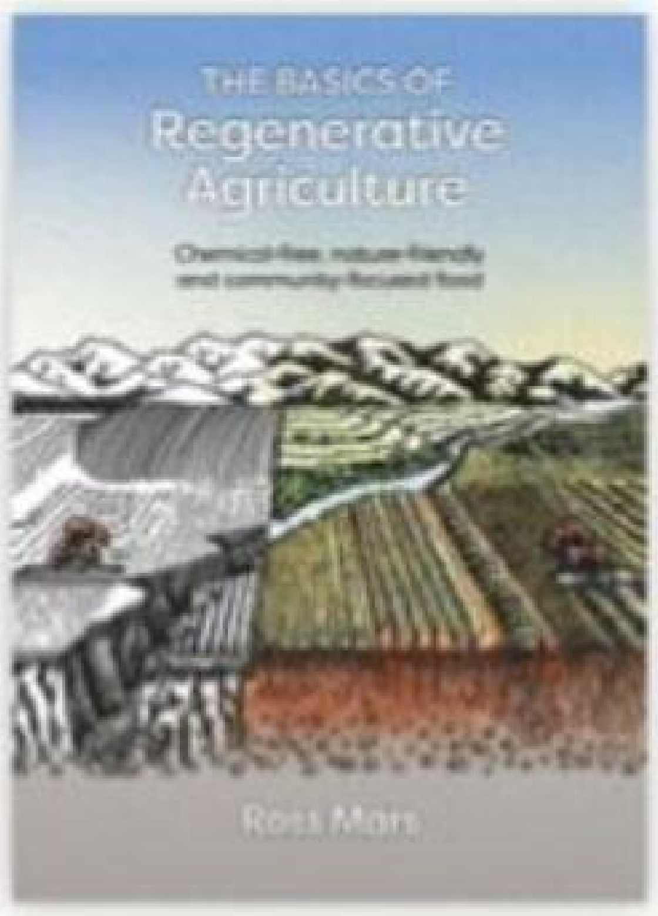


FIRE AND RAIN

Stephen LaDochy and Michael Witiw
SPRINGER, 2023

Veteran American meteorologists Stephen LaDochy and Michael Witiw present a detailed record of California's past and present climate and its flow-on effects for Earth. The Golden State's physical geography is influential in its climate and vegetation, including supporting the planet's tallest trees (redwoods), the biggest (sequoias) and the oldest (a Great Basin bristlecone pine). *Fire and Rain* is brimming with intriguing and confronting weather facts and geographic points of interest. We learn that Santa Ana winds from the Great Basin Desert flow towards the coast, descend onto the windward side of Southern California's mountains and pour through canyons fanning wildfires. Global heating is scorching California with catastrophic conflagrations, such as the recent Palisades and Eaton fires, and deadly droughts that are desiccating its $50bn per annum agriculture industry.

Reese Halter

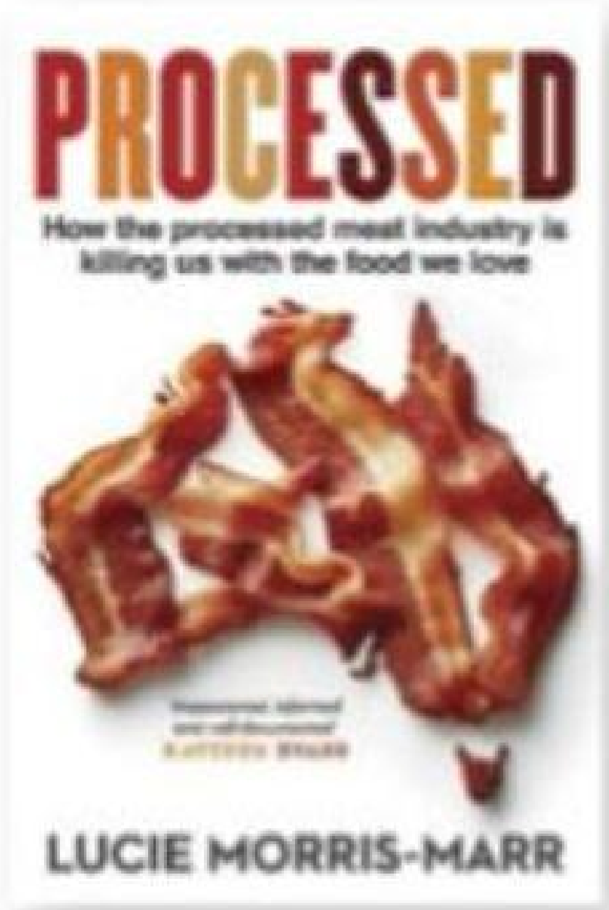


BASICS OF REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

Ross Mars PERMANENT PUBLICATIONS, 2024

There is no governing body setting the rules for regenerative agriculture, no one recipe, writes the late Ross Mars, a permaculture designer and consultant. Regen ag, he writes, is an umbrella term for practices creating healthier soils, and more biodiversity and hydrology in the landscape, while allowing farmers to run a viable and ethical business. Here, Mars lays down principles for regen ag, along with practical advice on improving soil, and how to use plants and animals in your system, employ integrated pest management and make the transition to more sustainable farming practices. Taking concepts from permaculture, holistic management, keyline farming and more, Mars shares his wide knowledge in an easily digested style, while offering insights to inspire more producers of chemical-free, nature-friendly and community-focused food.

Simon Webster


PROCESSED
How the processed meat industry is killing us with the food we love
LUCIE MORRIS-MARR

PROCESSED

Lucie Morris-Marr
ALLEN & UNWIN, 2025

Award-winning journalist Lucie Morris-Marr has not only been fighting for her life, she has been battling the processed meat industry and to convince Australians of serious dangers posed to their health. At 44 years of age, the mother of two was diagnosed with stage 4 bowel cancer and wants to raise awareness of the damaging health effects of popular staples such as bacon, ham, hot dogs, sausages, meat-lovers pizzas and salami. Despite an expert group from the World Health Organisation concluding that processed meat is a primary cause of cancer – in the same group as tobacco smoking and asbestos – Morris-Marr says there is a mass deafness, "a culture of ignoring the obvious because it just didn't suit anyone involved". That means the powerful processed meat industry, regulators, and addicted consumers. This a timely and informative book.

Steve Payne

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Fruits of the season

Looking to add autumn abundance to a small space? **Connie Cao** selects three fruit trees that will add fruit and colour.

As a backyard gardener, I'm highly passionate about selecting plant species that will meet multiple functions and make the most of my space.

As much as I'd love the awe-inspiring presence of a big maple tree in my autumn garden (alas, it wouldn't fit), I've come to realise that many of my small fruit trees can provide beauty, with the bonus of a rich harvest.

If you've got a spot you'd love to see filled with seasonal change, but don't want to compromise on yield, try one of the below fruit trees that will provide food and colour in your garden.

Pomegranate

Pomegranates are native to Iran and northern India and are one of the most ancient, cultivated fruits in the world. They are a wonderful addition to gardens for their showy autumn colour and bright red fruit that's perfect in salads and juices. The trees have a bushy habit and can be easily pruned to a compact size or edible hedge. In autumn, the leaves turn a blazing orange, then yellow, while fruits begin to mature at the tips of branches. They become heavier (and juicier!) as they ripen, bending branches into a weeping shape.

Pomegranates thrive in hot, dry summers and prefer a slightly acidic, well-draining soil – though they are adaptable plants. Remove fruit in the first few years to allow the framework of branches to form with bending. Make sure to regularly water your pomegranate trees, especially in late summer to reduce the chance of fruits cracking.

Varieties include 'Wonderful' which is a very popular variety with a taste that lives up to its name, or 'Shepherd's Special', a variety that originated from an old tree on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria. Grafted plants fruit within 2 years.

Persimmon

Native to China, persimmon trees grow with an upright, spreading habit with large, glossy green leaves that go through all the autumn changes. Like pomegranates, its red fruits hang proud and hang tight even after leaves have fallen.

Persimmon trees have sensitive roots and don't transplant well even when dormant. So, it's best to make a firm decision on where you want your tree before you get started. Give it a sheltered spot away from wind, to help branches hold the abundance of fruit they offer. Water regularly for the first two years.

All persimmon varieties can be harvested when fruits are red but firm, as fruits continue to soften and ripen off the tree. However, when they can be eaten, depends on whether the cultivar is a non-astringent or astringent type.

Non-astringent varieties, such as 'Fuyu' and 'Jiro' lose their astringency earlier and can be eaten crisp like an apple, or at various stages of softness. Astringent cultivars such as 'Dai Dai Maru' and 'Hachiya' will only lose their astringency when the fruit feels like an overripe tomato.

WIDTH: 2.5M

HEIGHT: 2.5M

FULL SUN/ PART SUN

HARVEST: Autumn

PHOTO: ISTOCK

WIDTH:
2–4M

HEIGHT:
2–4M

FULL SUN

HARVEST:
Summer

● TROPICAL
● SUBTROPICAL
● ARID/SEMI-ARID
● WARM TEMPERATE
● COLD TEMPERATE

WIDTH:
2–4M

HEIGHT:
2–4M

FULL SUN

HARVEST:
Summer

PHOTOS: GAP PHOTOS/JOHN SWITHINBANK/TOP: CONNIE CAO

Peaches

I often think of stone fruit as a lovely edible alternative to cherry blossoms. Peaches are a favourite as their flowers are an effervescent pink with crimson anthers, which turn into sweet fruits come summer.

The traditional time to plant a peach is in winter while the plant is dormant, but you can also plant potted peaches in autumn. Site it in a sunny spot with well-draining soil, and prune to 3–4 main branches to establish a neat framework. As the tree matures, pruning in winter or summer can help maintain the tree to your preferred size.

Variety wise, 'Silvan Sunset' also known as 'Four Seasons' is a real stand-out for its seasonal changes. It boasts abundant pink blossoms in spring, large golden fruit in summer, followed by autumn foliage, and striking, red branches in winter.

For small gardens, look for varieties grafted onto dwarf rootstock. These grow to 2–2.5m tall and wide but still produce an abundance of full-sized fruit. Most peaches are self-fertile so generally you'll only need one tree to get fruit.

PHOTO: ISTOCK

PHOTO: JIAN LIU

Broad bean BOUNTY

Jian Liu loves growing and eating broad beans – a highly nutritious mainstay winter crop. Here are her secrets for success.

Broad beans, also known as fava beans, are one of the oldest cultivated crops in the world. Not only are they easy to grow but they have a clever ability to fix nitrogen in the soil. This makes them a valuable multipurpose plant for any backyard vegie patch: to nourish our bodies (being rich in plant-based protein and fibre) and feed our soils as a green manure.

Unlike other beans that thrive in the heat, broad beans are cool-season plants. They are usually planted at the end of summer and grown over winter – a time when the garden can be a little bare. When I first started gardening, in an effort to improve our poor sandy soils and to fill our winter vegie beds, I planted forests of broad beans. Even in a confined space, I harvested more than 10kgs of broad beans (which we froze and enjoyed that entire year), while our soils were teeming with worms and life, ready for our summer vegies.

Because of all these wonderful qualities, broad beans have cemented themselves as an annual staple in our vegie patch. They are a highly rewarding vegie and here are my top tips on how to grow them.

When to plant

Broad beans take around 4–6 months to mature, so it's important to get them into the ground early and at the right time for your climate. In temperate areas, they can be planted as soon as you clear up your summer crops, typically in late summer or autumn.

In sub-tropical and arid climates, broad beans can be a little more challenging to grow, but with a few tricks it's not impossible. Your broad beans may have a shorter growing season and slightly reduced harvests, as you may need to wait until the coolest time of year (April to June) before planting. Broad beans are not suited to the tropics. For optimal results, choose quick maturing varieties and locally sourced seed from proven performers in your area.

Opposite page: Many parts of the broad bean plant are edible, from the young shoots to dried beans.
Left: Broad beans thrive in Jian's inner-city garden.

When at full size, broad beans are a large plant with wide, branching stems.

PHOTO: ISTOCK

growing TIPS

POSITION In temperate areas, plant in a spot that receives full winter sun all day (if possible); while in warmer climates, plants appreciate some afternoon shade.

SOIL While broad beans can tolerate heavy clay soils, they grow best in fluffy, well-draining soil. Mound soil or grow in raised beds filled with free-draining soil to prevent waterlogging. Prepare soil prior to planting by forking in compost, worm castings or the well-rotted manure of large animals (for example, cow, sheep, horse). While they have the ability to fix some of their own nitrogen, they will benefit from a little organic fertiliser, such as blood and bone and pelletised poultry manure, sprinkled as a side dressing after the seeds germinate.

SEED OR SEEDLINGS I recommend direct sowing seed rather than purchasing seedlings for a few reasons. First, broad bean seeds are large and easy to handle. Second, seeds are much cheaper to purchase, particularly if you are planting broad beans as a green manure – you can buy seeds in bulk very economically. Finally, sowing seeds directly in the soil means less work for you and less root disturbance for plants. Depending on your local temperature and conditions, seeds should germinate in around 1 week.

WATERING While broad beans are relatively drought tolerant once established, for optimal yields, water regularly and ensure plants never dry out around flowering and fruiting.

SPACING When at full size, broad beans are large plants and each plant can have a number of wide, branching stems. Be careful to give plants adequate space when sowing seed; I aim for around 30cm between plants.

SUPPORT Adequate staking is a key skill for growing broad beans. They are tall, lanky plants with brittle stems, and there is nothing more heartbreaking than finding plants snapped after a gust of wind. The easiest way I've found to give plants the support they need, is to drive a stake in each corner of your crop, and then run string around the outside, at three different heights. This saves the hassle of having to individually stake plants. As they grow, plants will also provide some support to each other – so don't space them too far apart. Alternatively, you can also plant against a sunny fence or trellis.

PHOTO: JIAN LIU

Flowering and harvesting

Broad bean plants will spend most of winter bulking up and growing to an impressive size. In late winter and early spring, delicate clusters of flowers will begin to appear, generally white in colour (but also coming in striking shades of crimson and chocolate), painted with deep purple highlights in the centres. Flowers have a light fragrance and look highly ornamental in the garden.

While flowers are self-pollinating, pollination is often aided by bees. It's common for early flowers not to set pods – good pod set tends to start in spring when conditions are warmer and more suitable for pollen production.

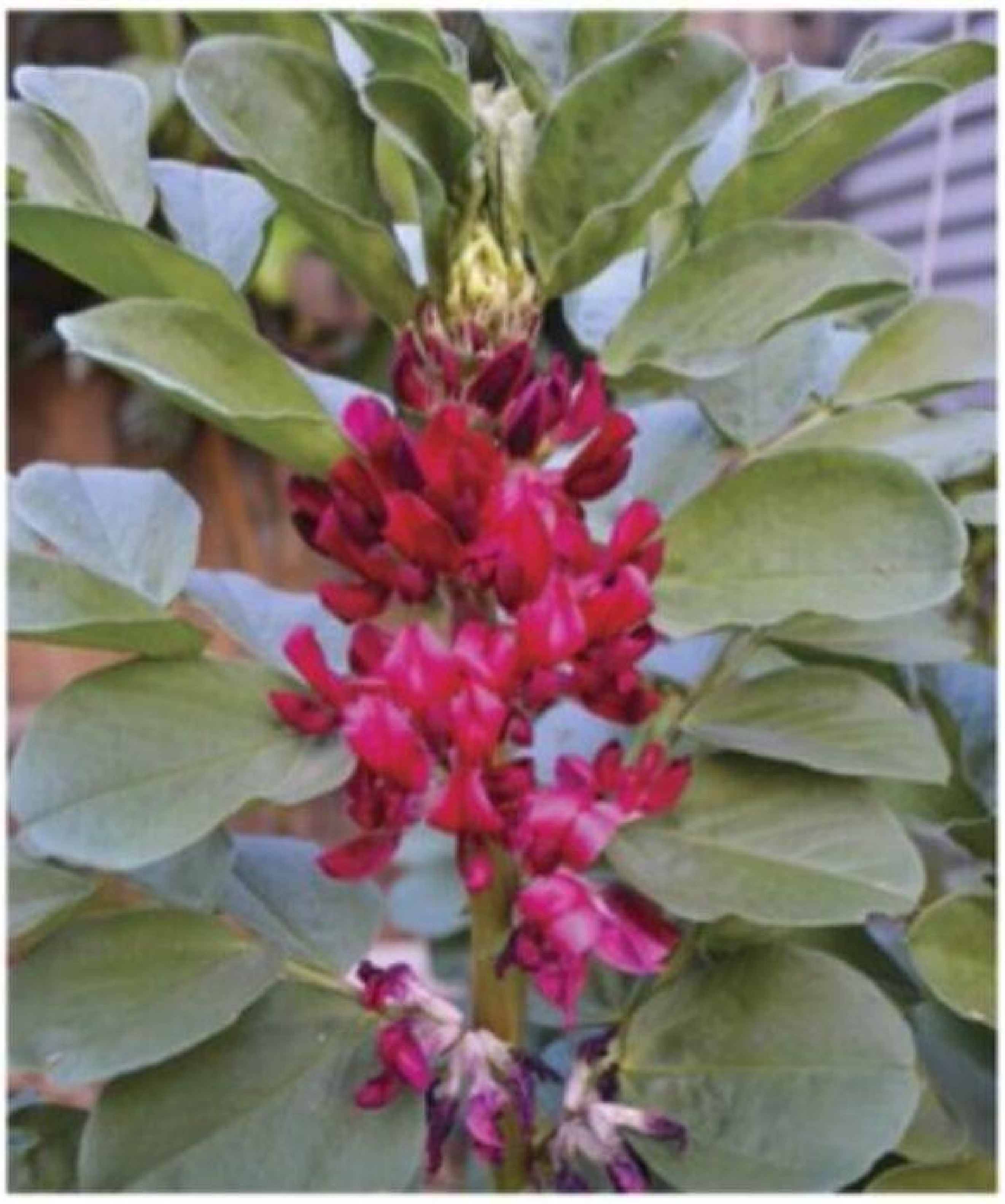
Broad beans are highly nutritious and versatile, providing something to harvest at every stage of growth. Many parts of the plant are edible:

Young leaves and shoots: Gently harvest once plants have reached a sufficient size, around 6 weeks after planting. These delicate greens have a mild flavour and can be enjoyed raw or cooked and added to salads, soups or stir-fries.

Flowers: Add colour to salads with the flowers or use as a garnish on cakes. They have a slightly sweet flavour.

Pods and seeds: If you're eager for a harvest, young pods can be enjoyed when tender and immature, and eaten whole like regular green beans. Most commonly though, broad beans are harvested when the seeds inside begin to bulge in the pod. The furry pod outside is then shelled and the seeds inside are eaten. If you pick the pods late, seeds can become tough and will benefit from 'double-shelling' (that is the process of removing both the pods and the inner skin of the seed to produce a more tender bean). Fresh broad beans have a delicious mild, nutty flavour, and are prized in many cuisines. Our personal favourite is to stir-fry broad beans with some garlic, chilli and soy sauce, and enjoy them on rice – simply divine! Broad beans can also be transformed into fava bean falafel, purees or dips, or enjoyed in Italian sauces and soups – the options are endless!

Dried beans: At the end of the season, beans can be left on the plant to dry. Wait until plants turn yellow and the outer pod starts to shrivel. Dried beans can be saved for replanting next season, and any excess can be shelled and stored away in jars. In this form, they last for many years and are a great sustenance plant! Use them like any dried bean – rehydrated and added to soups and stews.



Top: Broad beans are prolific producers.
Above: The heirloom Crimson has deep red flowers.

BROAD BEAN VARIETIES

Aquadulce Translating to 'sweet water' in Spanish, this is a popular variety for its long, tender green beans with a sweet flavour. It's high-yielding and relatively disease resistant, a great variety to grow if you're just starting out with broad beans.

Chocolate An unusual variety with rich chocolate-brown coloured flowers that add an interesting garnish to dishes and desserts, while also producing broad bean pods.

Coles dwarf An early-producing dwarf variety that grows less than a metre tall. You could get away without staking if planted in a sheltered location, or use this variety to minimise plant damage in windy locations.

Crimson Our personal favourite variety, with show-stopping deep red flowers that are stunning in a winter garden. Colourful and productive.

If you grow broad beans as a green manure, dig the chopped plants into the soil and let the mix sit.

Broad beans as a green manure

Regardless of whether you love eating broad beans or not, I highly recommend growing them over winter as a free fertiliser to enrich and protect your soil.

If your soil is looking poor and lifeless, broad beans make a cheap and easy green manure. A bed of broad beans can greatly improve your soil texture and fertility in preparation for your hungry summer crops.

When growing as a green manure, you can space plants much closer together (you can simply scatter seeds over the soil) given you're not concerned about a yield. Technically, with a green manure, plants should be chopped down and dug into the soil before they begin to set pods, in order to maximise the available nutrients in your soil (plants draw a lot of nutrients from the soil when setting seed). Let this lovely concoction sit in your soil for at least a month for the worms and soil life to work their magic. Once fully broken down, your soil will be rich and fudgy, teeming with life and filled with nutrients and organic matter.

Even if you decide to grow broad beans to eat the pods, you can still partially benefit from this process. Once pods are harvested, cut plants down and add to your soil or compost at the end of the season. After shelling, don't throw out those furry pods. You can also add them to your compost or simply drop onto your soil and they will act as both a mulch and fertiliser.

PESTS & DISEASES

Fungal diseases are the biggest headache affecting broad beans. Plants can suffer from 'rust', which forms brown, raised blotches on plant leaves, or powdery mildew, which appears as a white, dull layer on plants. Prevention is better than cure, so ensure adequate spacing and ventilation around plants. In humid areas, you can space plants further apart (50cm for example).

For rust, practise crop rotation and choose rust resistant varieties, such as Aquadulce.

Dispose of affected leaves in the green bin and, for severe infestations, you can spray an organic copper-based fungicide. Note: you can still eat the seeds of pods with fungal diseases, but they will reduce your yield and the appearance of plants.

Aphids can attack young plants. You'll find the aphids on the tender tips of plants. Squish at first sighting and spray with a soap solution or oil-based spray for larger numbers. og

PHOTO: JIAN LIU

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INPUT FOR ORGANIC PRODUCTION

Don't worry about a pumpkin glut as there's many ways to store and use these beauties.

PHOTO: ANNEMARIE BOLDUC

The great PUMPKIN HARVEST

Phil Dudman is ready to make the most of this year's pumpkin crop. So can you with his advice on optimal picking time, storage tips and seed-saving essentials. Plus, preparing for next season.

Pumpkins are a part of our gardening and culinary DNA. Even the most reluctant gardeners make an allowance for a rogue vine that's mysteriously popped up in the corner of the yard, clambering over fences and claiming half the neighbourhood.

Homegrown pumpkins are a bona fide urban commodity – you can always swap them with the neighbours for fresh eggs or a handful of lemons, and with a bit of TLC, they'll store for months. It's like money in the bank!

As the pumpkin growing season winds down, let's dig into some handy tips for picking, prepping, and storing your harvest. Plus, we'll get a head start on planning next season's crop and brainstorm creative ways to tackle a glorious pumpkin glut!

Nothing stands in the way of a pumpkin vine – a healthy plant will always find the light.

PHOTO: ISTOCK

Waiting for your vine to die back is the easiest way to be sure your pumpkin is ripe.

HARVESTING

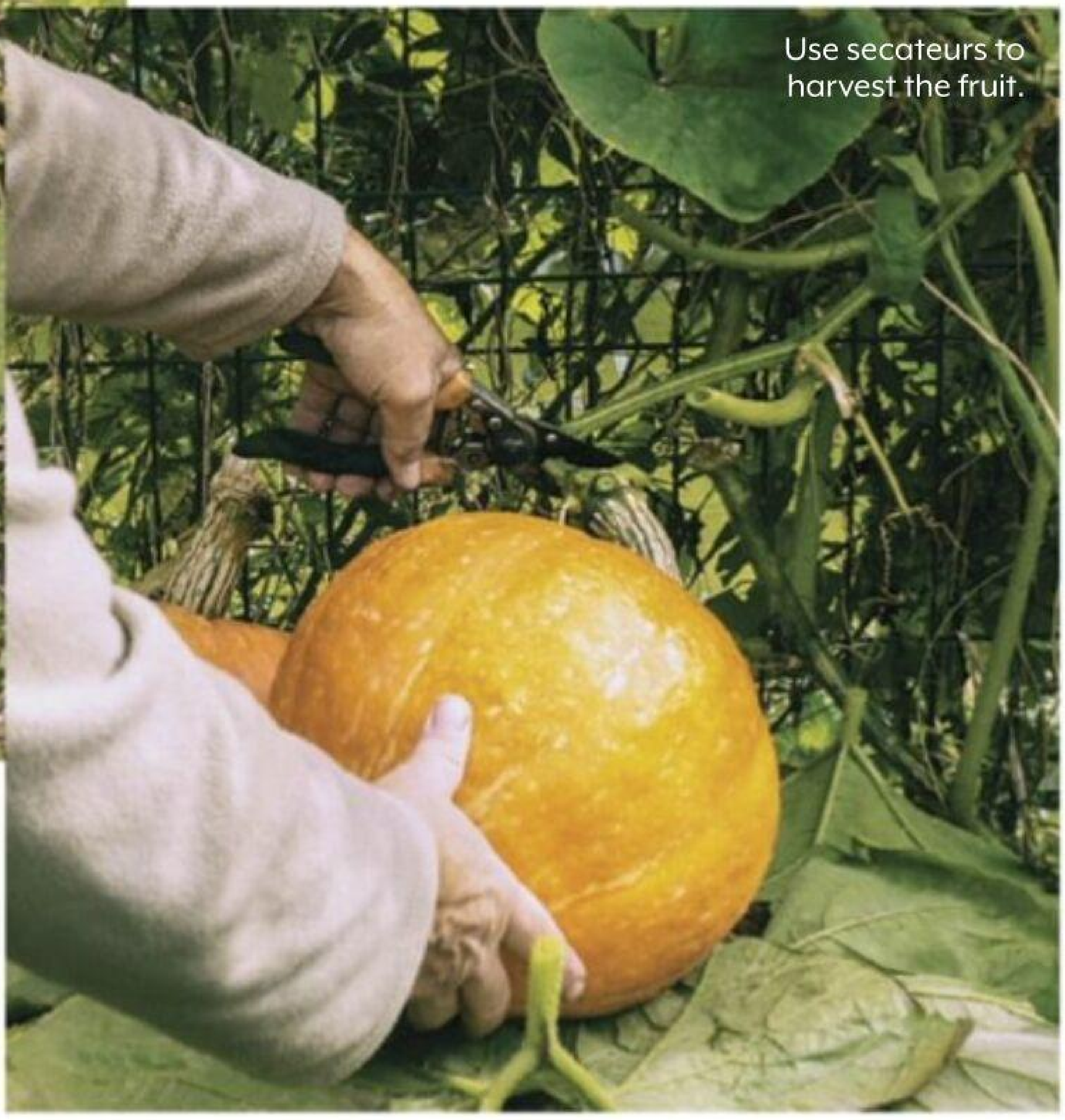
The key to harvesting pumpkins is patience – leave them on the vine as long as possible to let them fully ripen. Removing some leaves around the fruit can help by increasing sun exposure and airflow as they mature. An easy way to know you're picking your pumpkins at their best is to simply wait until the vine begins to die back. However, don't wait too long – make sure to harvest before heavy frosts arrive, as they can damage the skins and reduce storage quality.

If you're eager to pick early, size and colour are your clues for readiness. When a fruit has reached its typical size, displays the mature colour of its variety and has lost its shine, it may be ready for picking. To confirm, give it a good knock – it should sound hollow, a classic sign of ripeness.

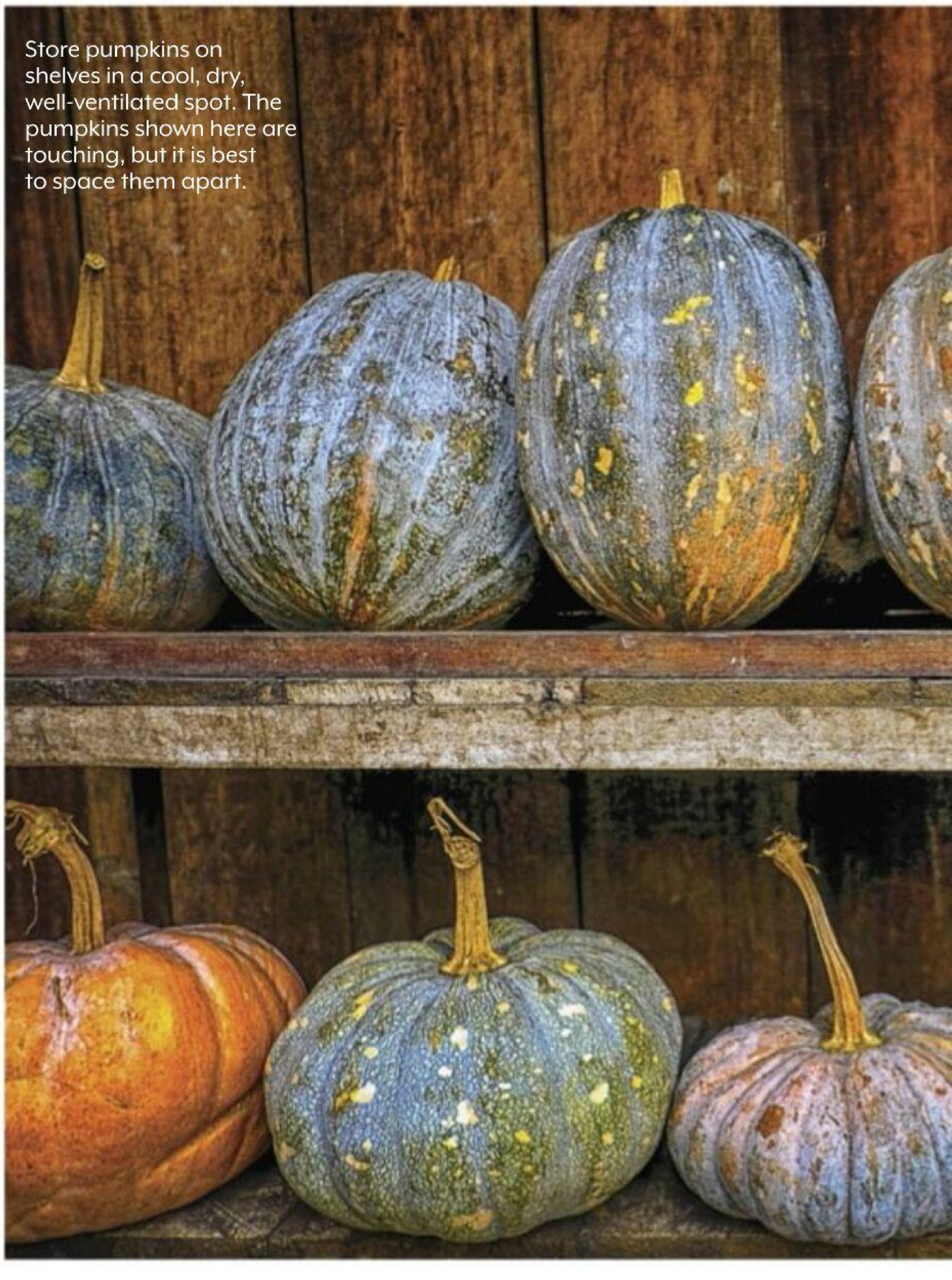
When harvesting, use secateurs to carefully cut the pumpkin from the vine and always leave a long piece of stem attached. Avoid pulling the stem off the fruit, as this will leave an open wound at the attachment point, inviting unwanted fungi and bacteria that lead to rot.

And while we're on the topic, never carry your pumpkins by the stem, as it might break off and shorten their storage life. If any damage does occur, sealing the wound at the attachment point with melted candle wax can help protect the fruit.

Finally, take care when maintaining the garden or lawn near developing pumpkins. A stray nick from a mower, whipper snipper, or trowel can damage the fruit and create an entry point for rot.



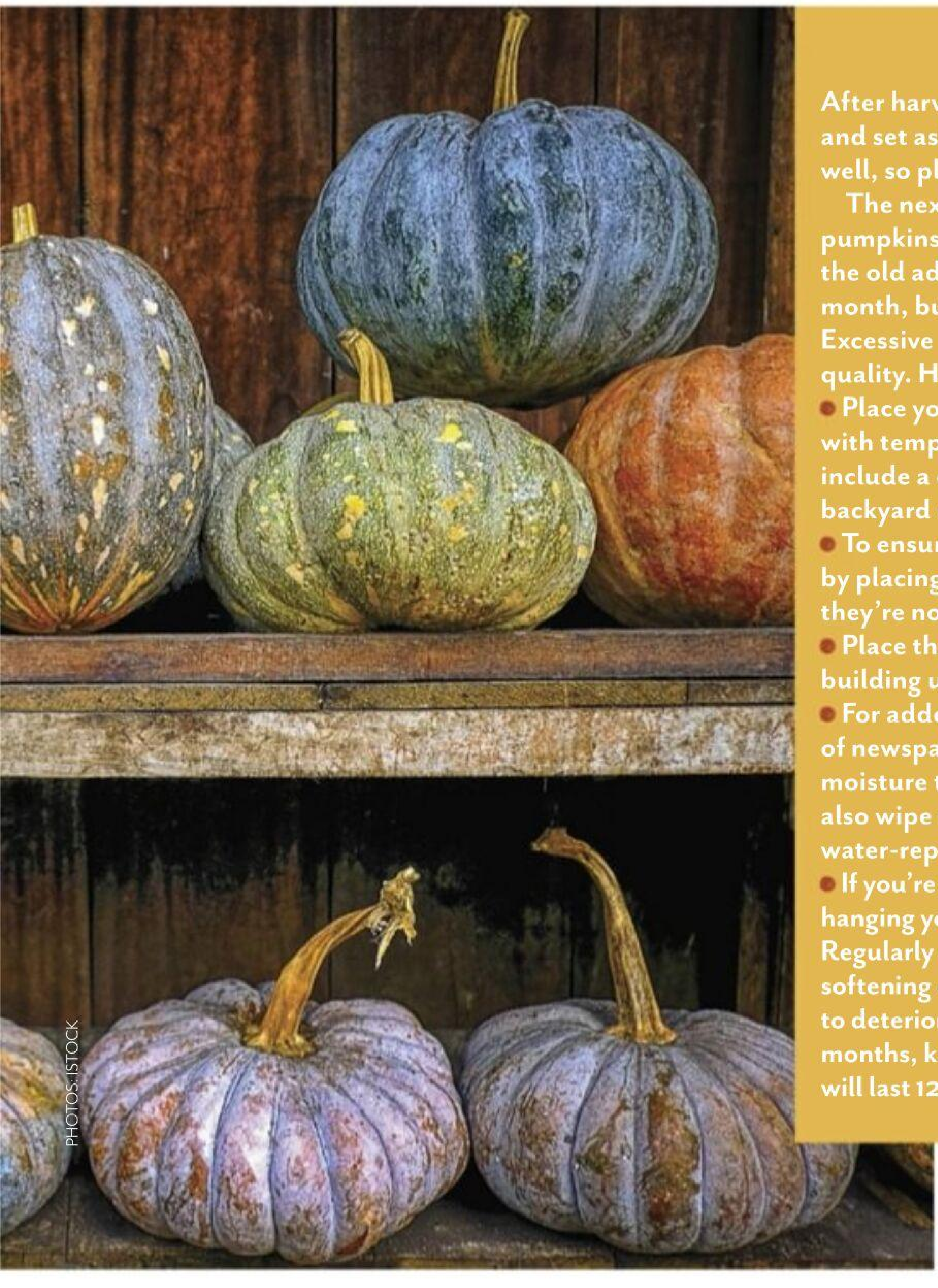
Use secateurs to harvest the fruit.



Store pumpkins on shelves in a cool, dry, well-ventilated spot. The pumpkins shown here are touching, but it is best to space them apart.

Handle pumpkins carefully to avoid damage.

Right: Place stored pumpkins on straw to absorb moisture.



PHOTOS: ISTOCK

STORING

After harvesting your pumpkins, inspect each one carefully and set aside any with nicks or damage. These won't store well, so plan to eat them first.

The next step is to cure the skins of the remaining pumpkins to harden them for storage. You might have heard the old advice to place pumpkins on a tin roof in the sun for a month, but unless conditions are cold, it's best to avoid this. Excessive heat can start to cook the fruit, reducing its keeping quality. Here are the keys to successful long-term storage:

- Place your pumpkins in a cool, dry, well-ventilated spot with temperatures around 10–15°C. Ideal locations could include a cool pantry, larder, under the house, or a shaded backyard shed.
- To ensure proper airflow, keep the pumpkins off the ground by placing them on shelves or racks, and space them out so they're not touching.
- Place them on their sides to reduce the chance of moisture building up around the stems.
- For added protection, sit the fruit on a few sheets of newspaper or a shallow bed of straw to absorb any moisture that might form on the skin. Some gardeners also wipe the skins with vegetable oil to create a protective, water-repellent layer.
- If you're battling rats or mice, consider getting creative by hanging your pumpkins in slings suspended from the ceiling.

Regularly check your stored pumpkins for any signs of softening or decay and promptly remove any that are starting to deteriorate. Most fruit will store beautifully for at least three months, keeping you in pumpkins through the winter. Some will last 12 months and retain an excellent eating quality.

PLANNING YOUR NEXT CROP

Is all this pumpkin talk making you itchy to get growing? Here is some essential growing information to help you get started.

PLANTING TIME

- Sow and plant in spring with crops ready to harvest in autumn.
- In tropical regions, sow in autumn for a dry season crop that's ready in spring.

SUN AND SPACE

- Choose a bright, sunny spot with room for vines to ramble.
- If you're tight for space, train vines on a trellis or try a bush variety.

SOIL PREPARATION

- Ensure good drainage – create compost-enriched mounds 30cm tall and 50cm wide. Space mounds 1–1.5m apart.
- Check pH – if soil is acidic, add garden lime or wood ash.

SOWING

- Direct sow in warm soil; plant 2–3 seeds 3–5cm deep per spot, thinning to the strongest seedling. Water well after sowing, then let the soil dry slightly between waterings to avoid seed rot.
- For a head start, sow seeds in pots indoors from late winter, then plant out after soil warms and risk of frost passes.

WATERING

- Water regularly in dry times to keep roots moist.

FERTILISING

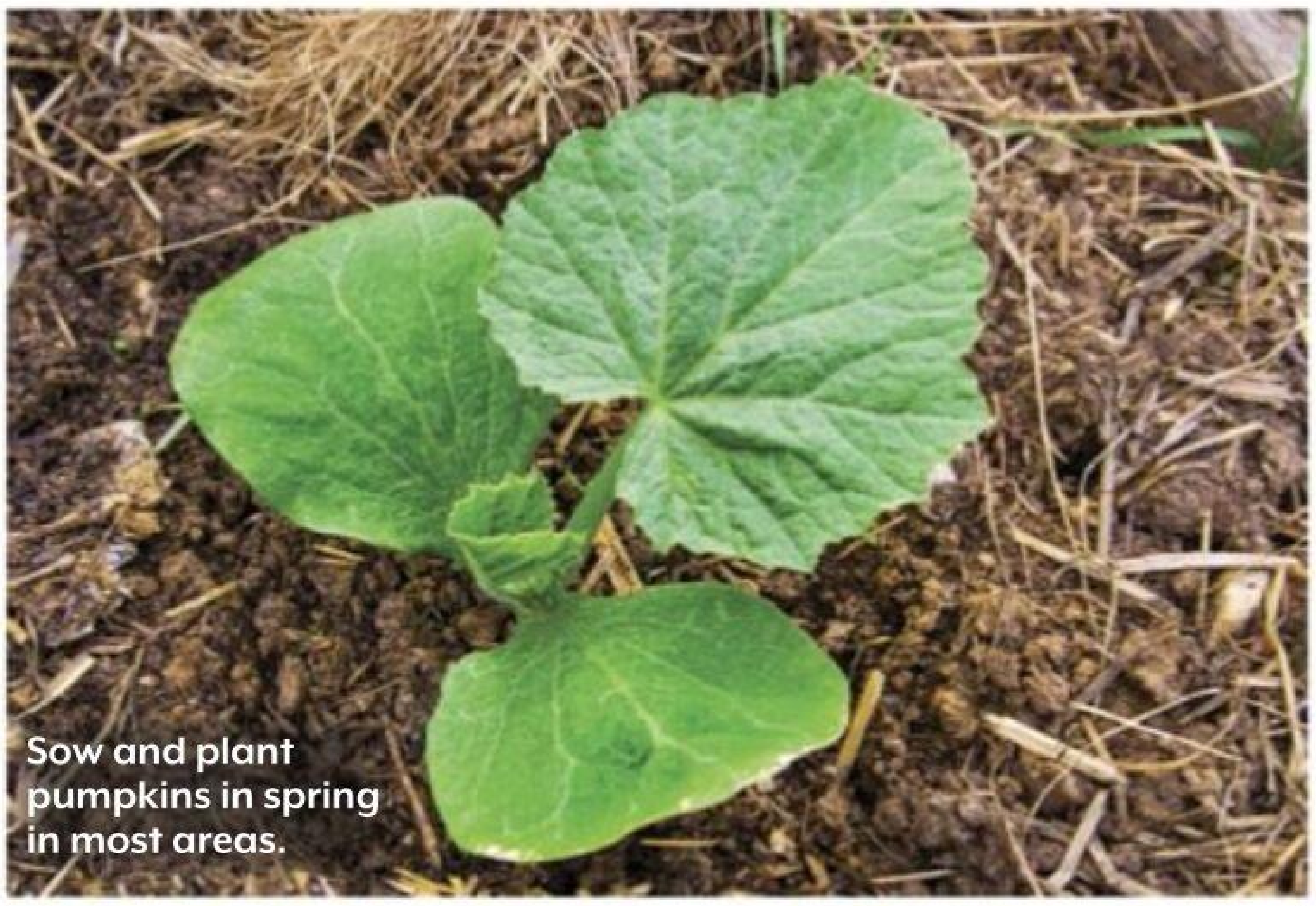
- Feed seedlings weekly with diluted fish emulsion until established.
- Apply organic fertiliser at planting and every 6 weeks onwards.

POLLINATION

- Encourage bees for natural pollination. If fruit fail to form, try hand-pollinating flowers. See page 30 for tips to help with pollinating.

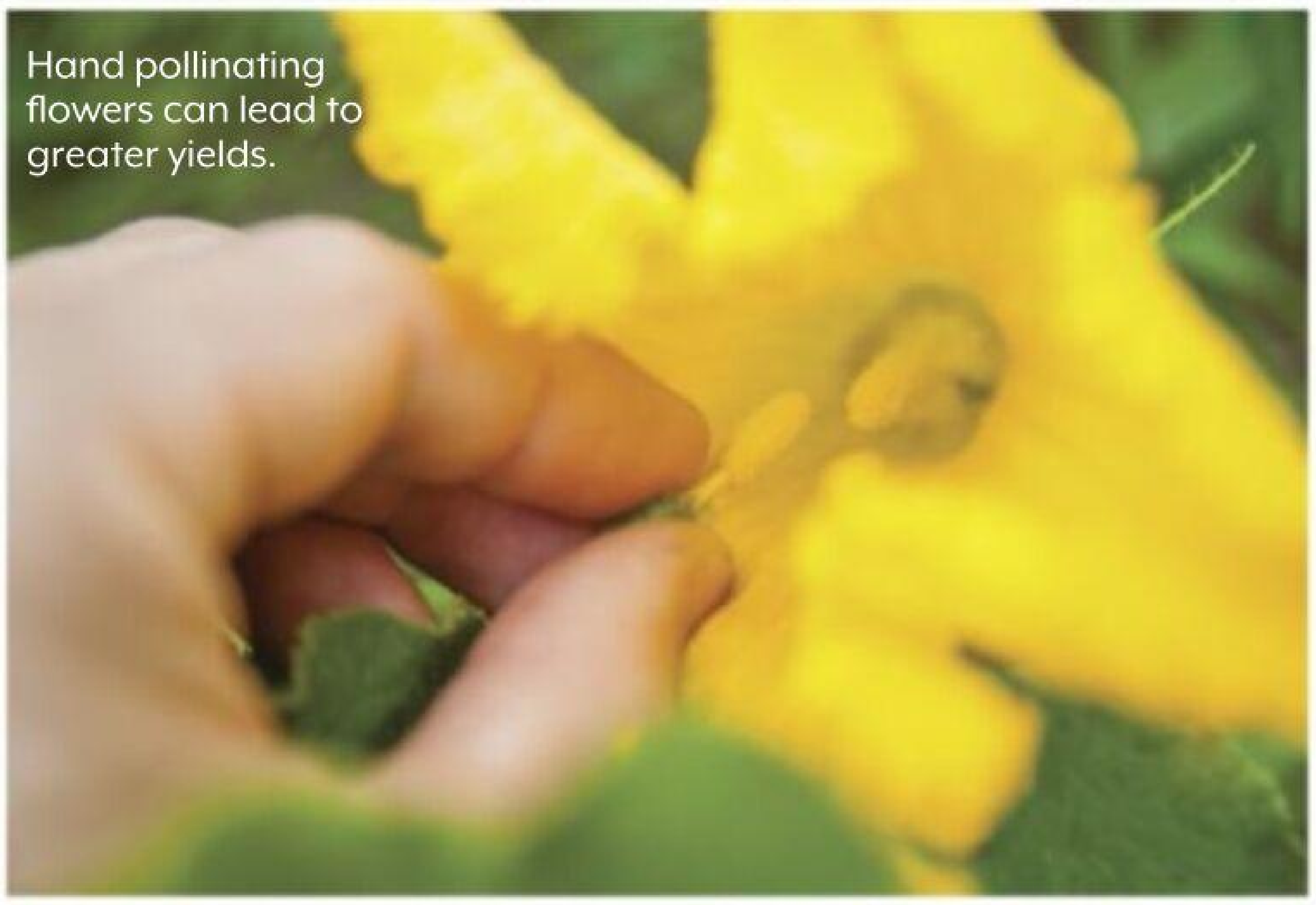
PEST AND DISEASE CONTROL

- Prevent powdery mildew by spraying leaves weekly with a milk solution (1 part milk to 9 parts water) or apply a potassium bicarbonate spray according to product directions.
- Enclose fruit in wire mesh cages if rats are a problem.

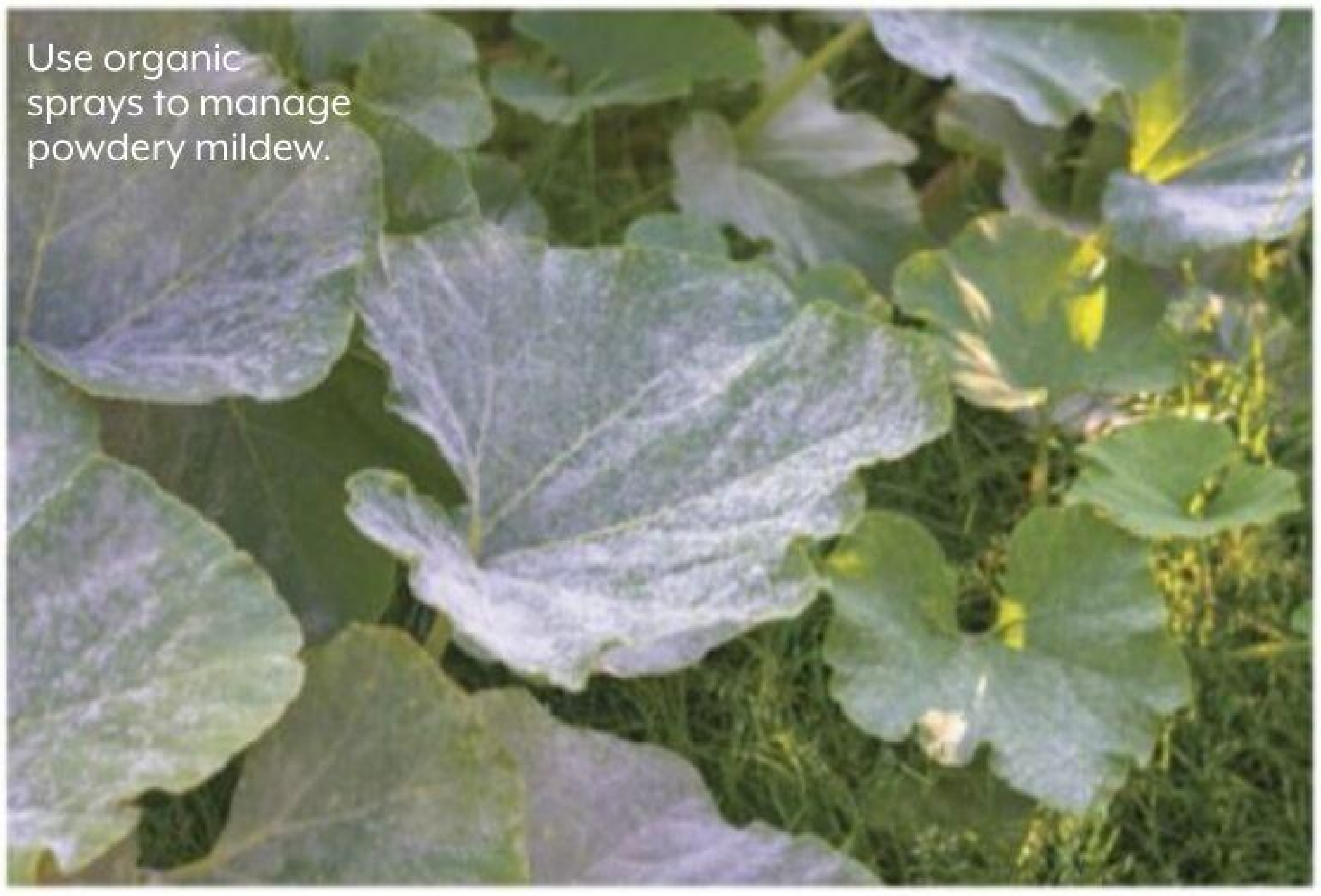


Sow and plant pumpkins in spring in most areas.

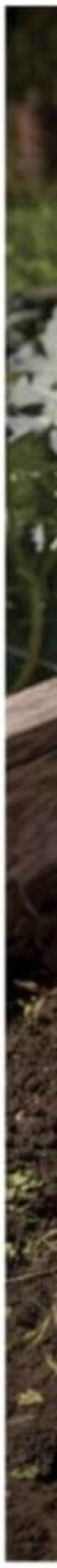
Start seed in containers indoors for a head start.



Hand pollinating flowers can lead to greater yields.

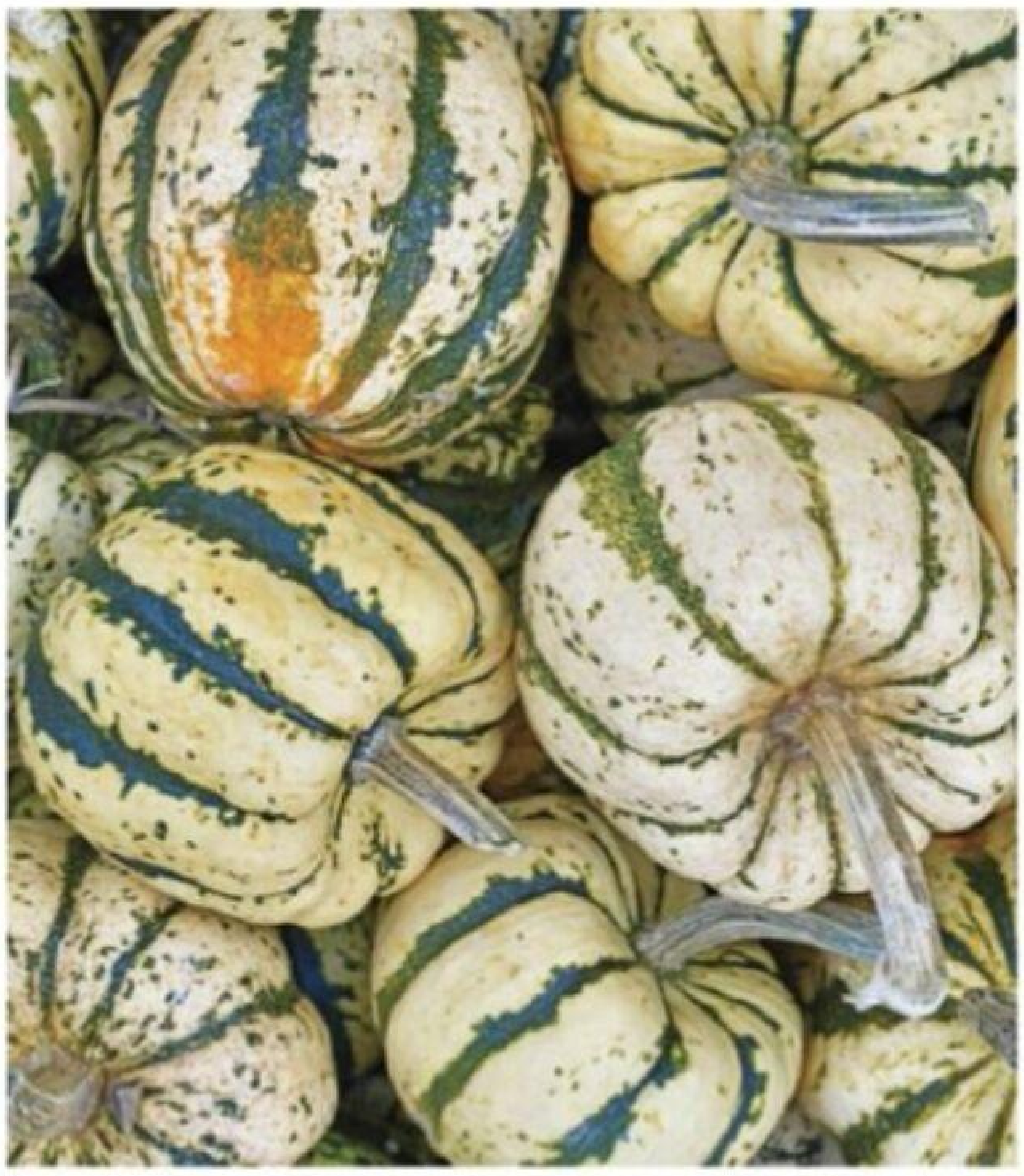


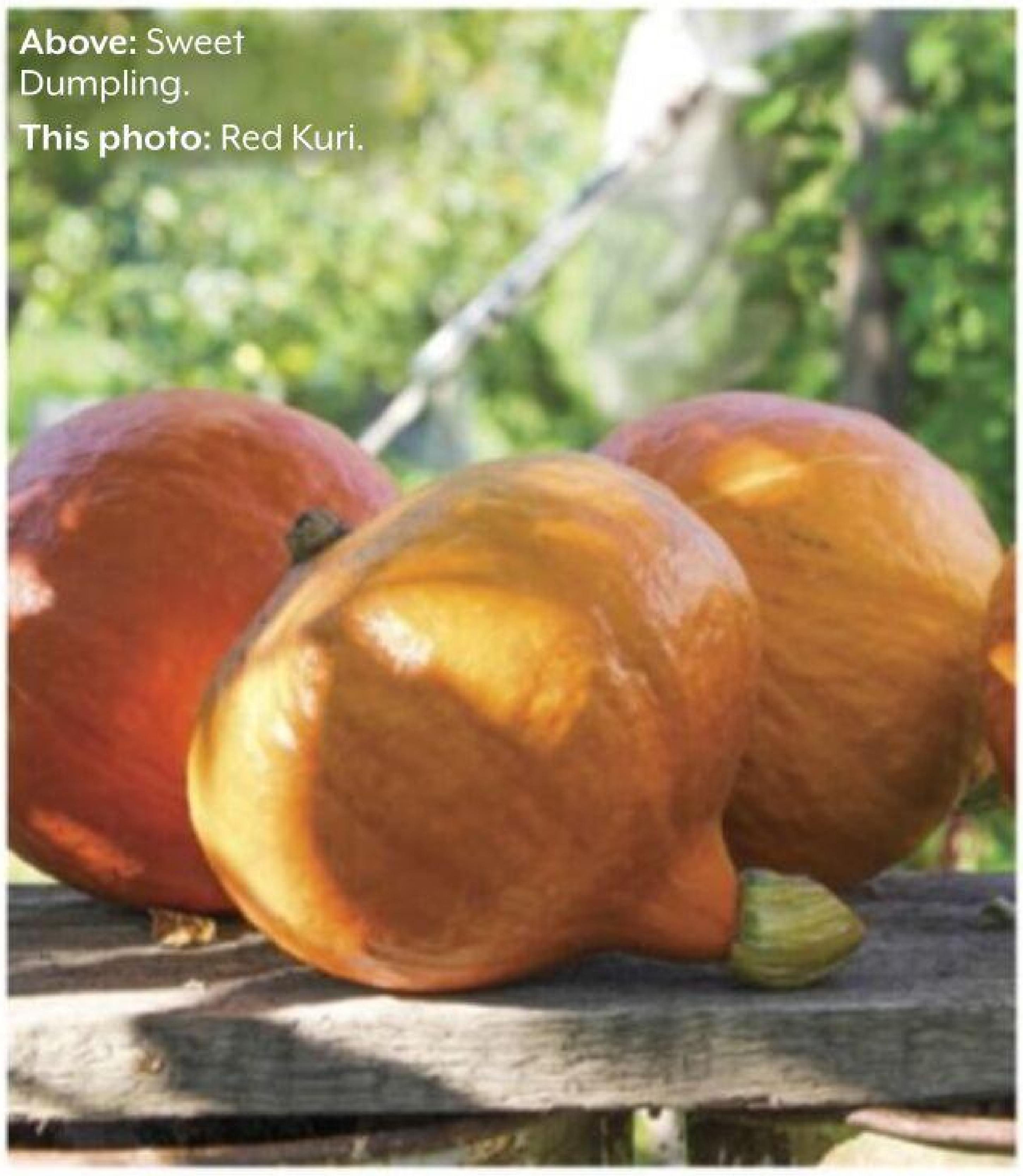
Use organic sprays to manage powdery mildew.



PHOTOS & ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCK

Golden nugget produce large crops of mini pumpkins.



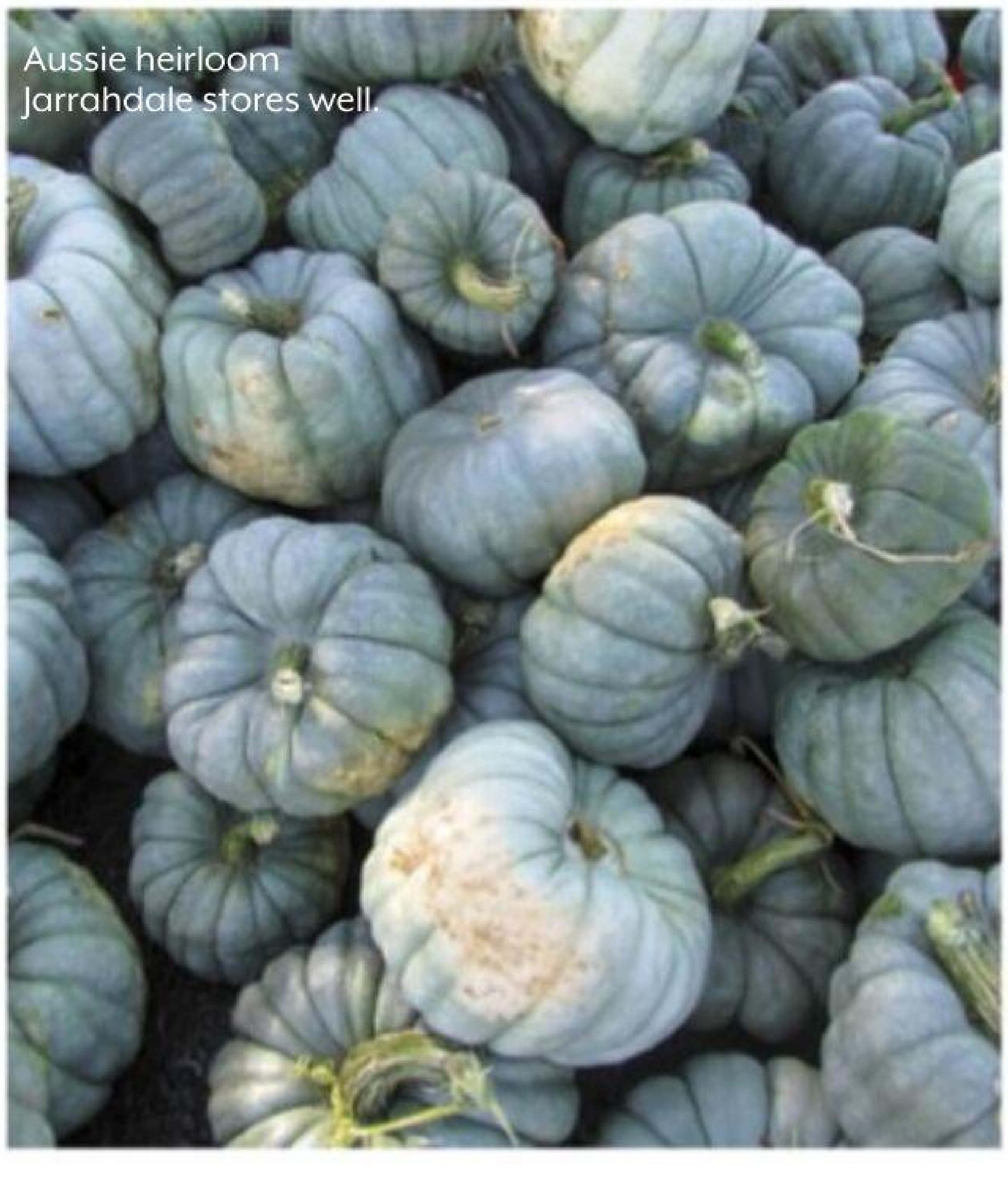


Above: Sweet Dumpling.

This photo: Red Kuri.

TOP PUMPKINS

BUTTERNUT	One of the most-loved pumpkins with smooth, pale-golden skin and sweet, nutty flesh.
QUEENSLAND BLUE	Iconic Aussie heirloom with rich flavour and excellent long-term storage.
RED KURI	Japanese heirloom with red-skinned, droplet-shaped fruit; ideal for roasting.
JARRAHDALE	Grey-skinned, delicious flesh. Thrives in dry summers and stores exceptionally well.
GOLDEN NUGGET	Compact bush variety that yields large crops of mini pumpkins with vibrant orange skin.
SWEET DUMPLING	Eye-catching small fruit with white and green striped skin and delicate, sweet flesh.
FUTSU	Sweet Japanese heirloom with deeply ribbed skin that transitions from black to orange during curing.



Aussie heirloom Jarrahdale stores well.

PHOTOS: TOP LEFT: PETER MATTHEW /ISTOCK

Eat the glut

Got more pumpkins than you can handle? No worries – there are plenty of ways to put them to good use! Pumpkin shines in both sweet and savoury dishes. Try it in pies, muffins, and scones, or whip up hearty winter favourites such as soups, curries, risottos, lasagne, and other pasta dishes. Roast it and toss it into salads, or blend it into a creamy dip, or a chickpea hummus for a tasty pumpkin twist. You can also preserve your pumpkin – freeze it, dry it or pickle it.

And don't forget the seeds! They're a tasty snack with a bit of prep. Simply wash off the fibrous pulp, spread the seeds on an oven tray, and dry them in a low oven (about 50°C) for 6 hours or so. Once dried, toss them with olive oil and salt, then roast at 180°C for 10–15 minutes until golden and irresistible.

Pickles to lasagne – there's many ways to use any excess.

Pumpkin seeds make a tasty snack.

Saving seed

If you're growing open-pollinated (heirloom) pumpkins, you can save the seed to grow future crops. All things going well, the plants and fruit will be identical to the parent variety. Here's the catch: pumpkin flowers are pollinated by bees, which often share pollen between neighbouring pumpkin plants. This results in hybrids, and it happens quite often in the pumpkin patch.

I once saved seed from a Butternut pumpkin that was grown at the same time my neighbour was growing Kent pumpkins. When I later planted the seed, the fruit was a curious mix: the familiar pear-like shape of a Butternut with the stripes and speckles of a Kent.

It was a fun surprise and still tasted great, but if you want to ensure your seeds grow true to type, a little extra effort is required.

The easiest solution is to grow only one pumpkin variety in your garden each summer.

If that's not an option, you'll need to hand-pollinate. Select an unopened female flower (you'll spot it by the tiny fruit at its base) and cover it with a nylon stocking. When the flower opens, collect pollen from a male flower (the ones on slender stems) of the same variety and transfer it to the female flower. Re-cover the flower for a few days to prevent any unplanned pollination and loosely tie a ribbon around the stem so you know which fruit to harvest your seed from.

To store your harvested seeds, wash off the pulpy coating and lay them out on paper towel to dry completely. Once dry, place them in an airtight container, label them with the variety and harvest date, and store them in a cool, dark, dry spot. Properly stored, pumpkin seeds can stay viable for up to four years.

PHOTO: ISTOCK

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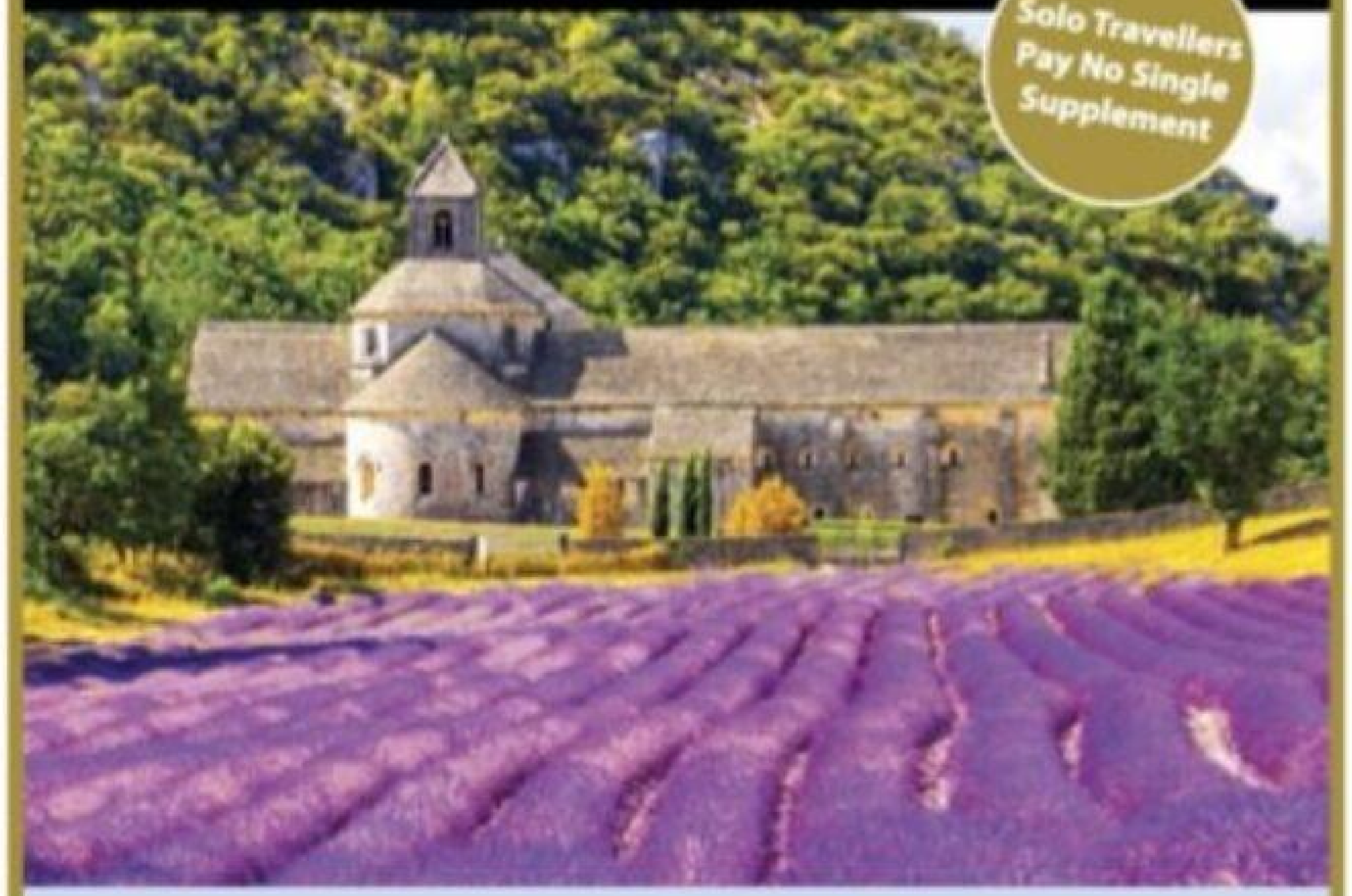

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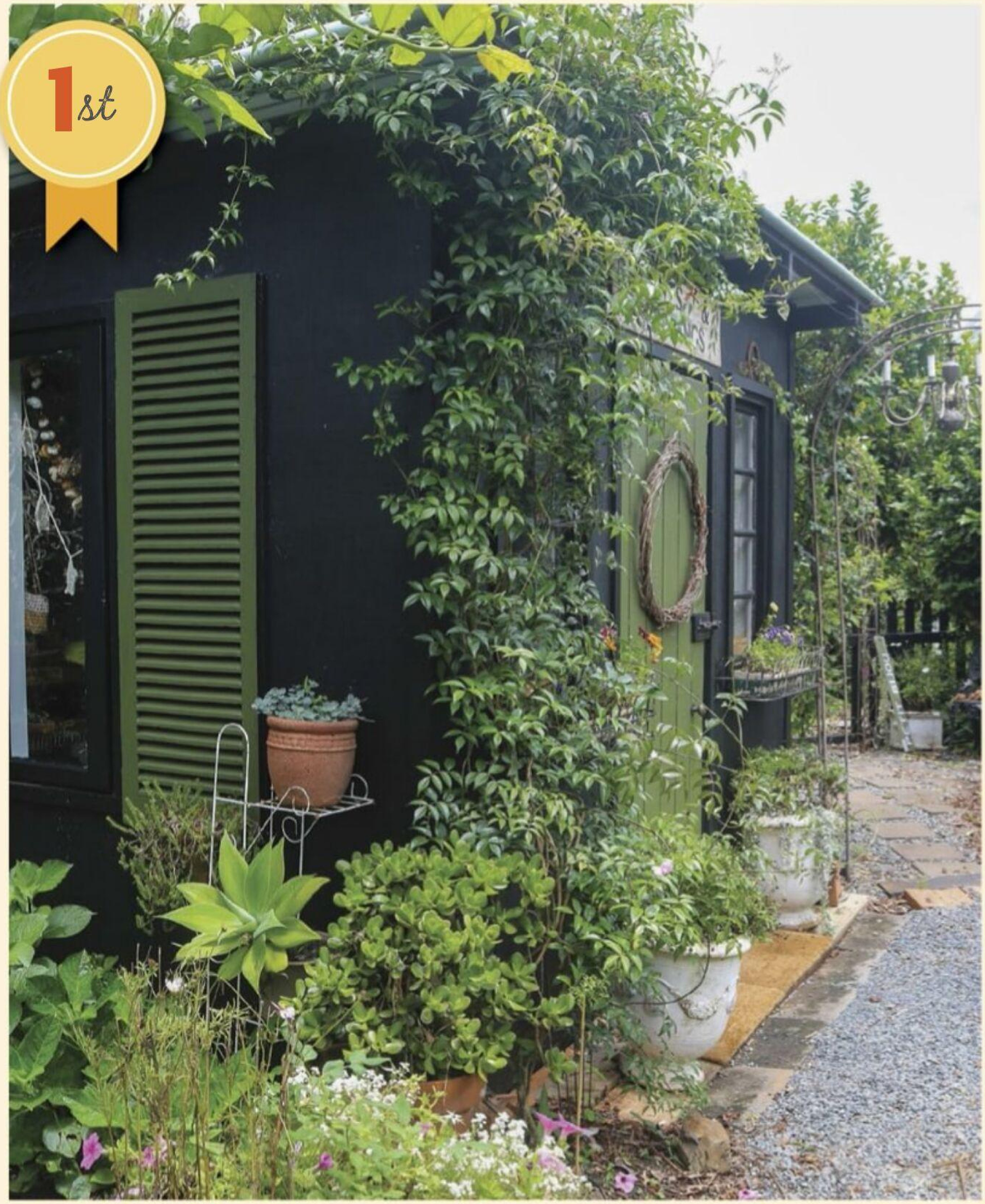

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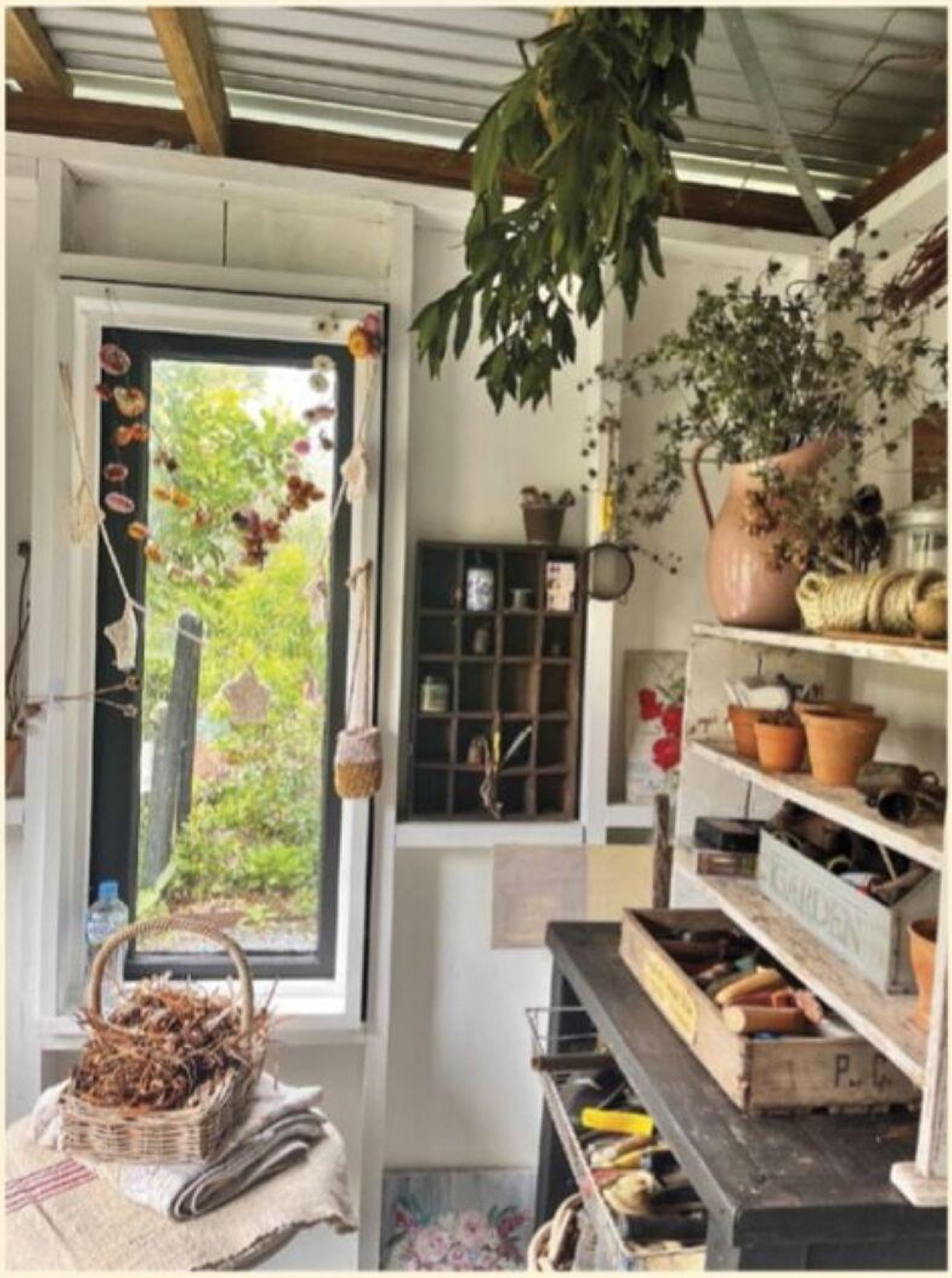


We've chosen the top three in our **Show Us Your Shed** competition.

Our Show Us Your Shed competition has been a great success, thanks to all the gardeners out there who told their stories, took pictures and then shared them with the *OG* editorial team.

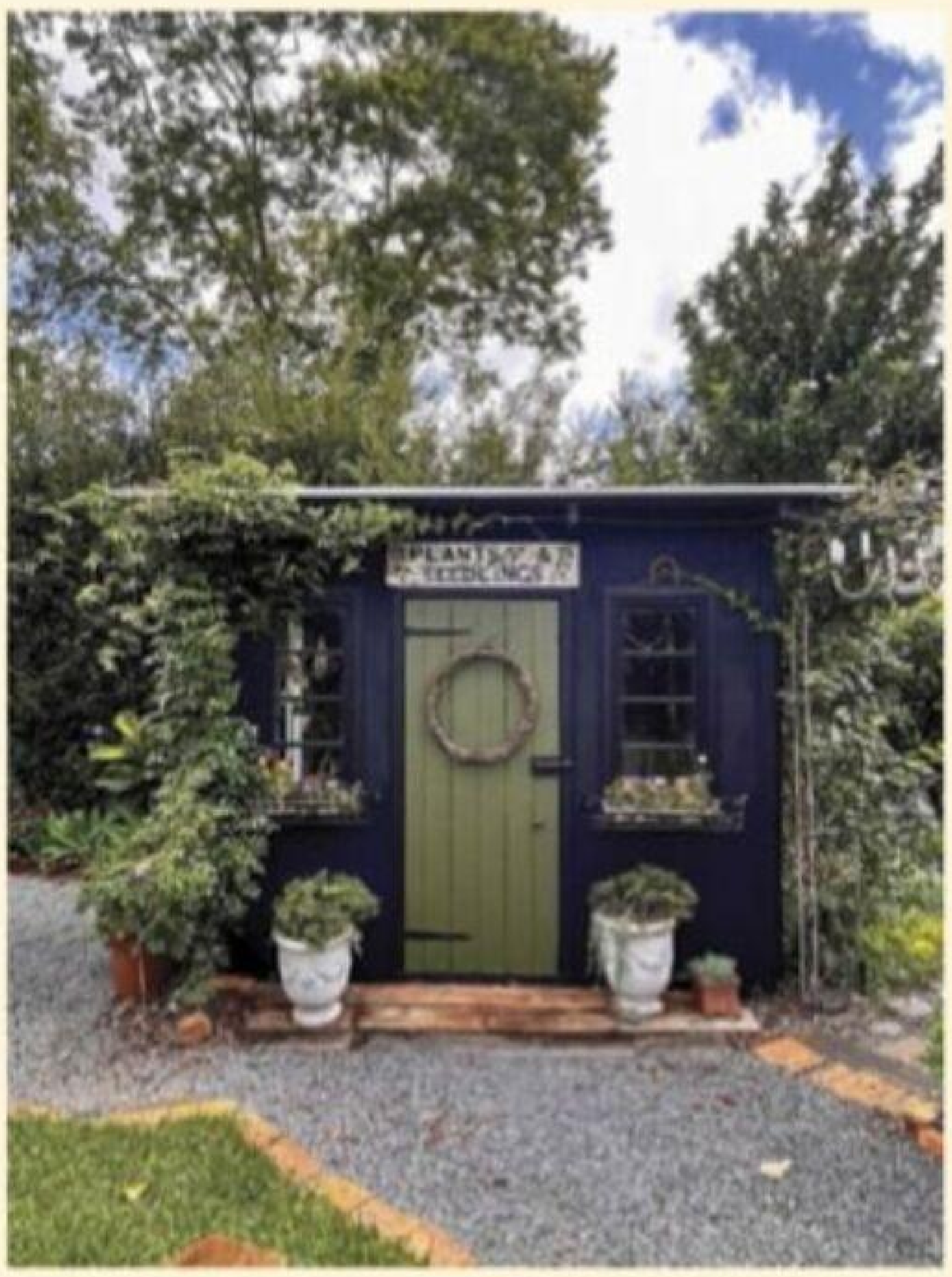
Sheds are clearly a combination of creative expression and functionality, but also often a refuge from the busy world, allowing space for quiet work and contemplation. From sprawling converted garages to tiny telephone box-sized retreats, we've seen sheds that tell incredible stories. Your shed is more than just a structure – it's a reflection of your passion, creativity and love for gardening.

It was a tough decision for editor Steve Payne, art director Karen Berge and deputy editor Leanne Croker to narrow down the top picks – so many to choose from. But we're thrilled to reveal the winning entries here! Congratulations to all!

FIRST PLACE

Pam Glucina **Toothdale, NSW**

Pam's shed appealed as it is clearly a space where she can tackle her to-do list (seed sorting, drying flowers, planting out seeds), while providing a place to enjoy the creativity she loves. Here's how she describes it:



> My garden shed is inspired by a Scandi design style. Its black facade and flat roof provide a striking contrast to our home. Climbing vines are slowly ensuring the shed blends seamlessly within the secluded garden setting.
>
> Working closely with my very creative neighbour, who is also our builder, we have elevated wooden sleeper floors which provide a rustic element, while reclaimed windows from an old cottage and a farmhouse door sourced locally contribute to its unique character. This is my only practical working garden shed, featuring designated areas for seed sorting, tool organisation, and drying flowers and herbs. Additionally, it serves as a storage space for fertilisers and propagating mediums. Every tool has its place and goes back into its place.
>
> A cosy nook with a refurbished vintage chair and an old chandelier create a sense of down to earth charm, for muddy boots and dirty hands. Perfect garden shed ethics for me.

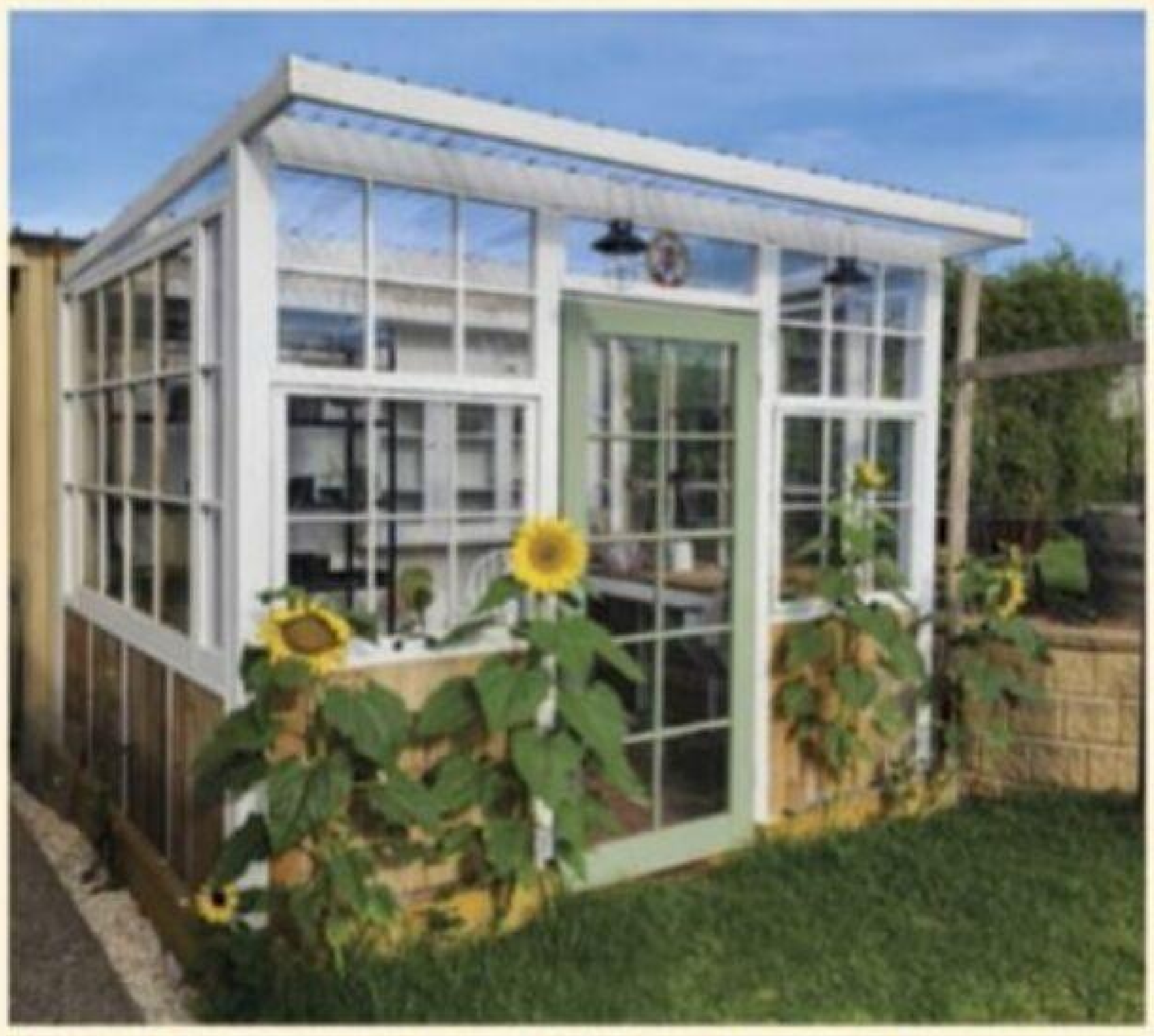
2nd

SECOND PLACE

Ashley Mignone **Aldinga Beach, SA**

The judges loved this shed, only problem is we'd spend more time in the shed than our gardens. A truly beautiful space, reflecting Ashley's creativity, and love for gardening. Here's Ashley's description of her shed:

> "Once I discovered my passion for gardening, I knew I needed a shed for my potting mix and seedlings. My amazing hubby and I used recycled stuff – old windows, doors, the works – to build our rustic shed. We even got old decking for the bench, which we sealed with beeswax from our own hive! Pallets were super handy, too.
>
> We were all about being eco-friendly, and it gave the shed so much charm. I use it every day; sometimes I just sit there with my coffee, listening to the rain. It's never lonely, with the chickens always peeking in.



THIRD PLACE

Jayne Williamson

Chatswood, NSW

Not everyone has a lot of space in their backyard when it comes to gardening and this shed, which editor Steve described as “a great example of small but sweet and functional”, was our pick of the tiny but useful sheds submitted. We love the way Jayne squeezes everything in that she might need to get her to-do list done. Here’s what she says:

I love my shed. A project started from a lack of space and a love for repurposing building materials I have collected over many years.

As a child, I watched my father build our family home, then a country weekender. As a man born in the depression years, he never wasted anything.

I learned many things from him, so a shed was the perfect project for me.

He has since passed away, but I hope that he would have been proud of my accomplishment.

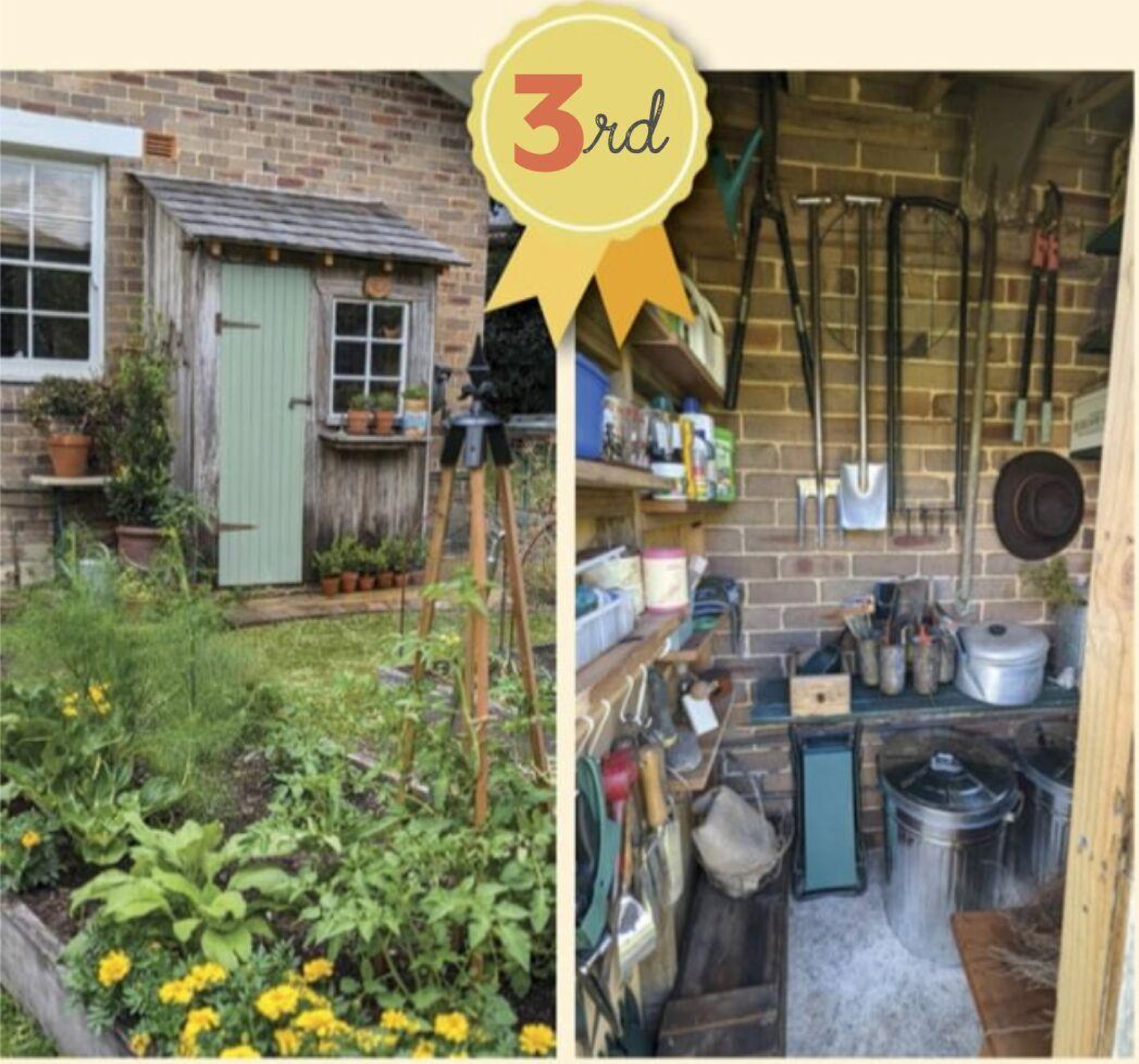
My home is 100 years old, so the shed needed to complement the houses heritage and my vegetable garden.

A tradesman laid the concrete base and from there, I built the frame – cutting, drilling and nailing the second-hand timber. I had collected old hardwood fence palings, which I used as cladding, with some still having wire in them from their fencing days.

A discarded window from a neighbourhood clean-up was perfect for light and I sourced used shingles which I painstakingly nailed and glued.

The interior shelving is still a work in progress as my need for garden items grows.

I think of my dear father and smile whenever I tend to my garden.



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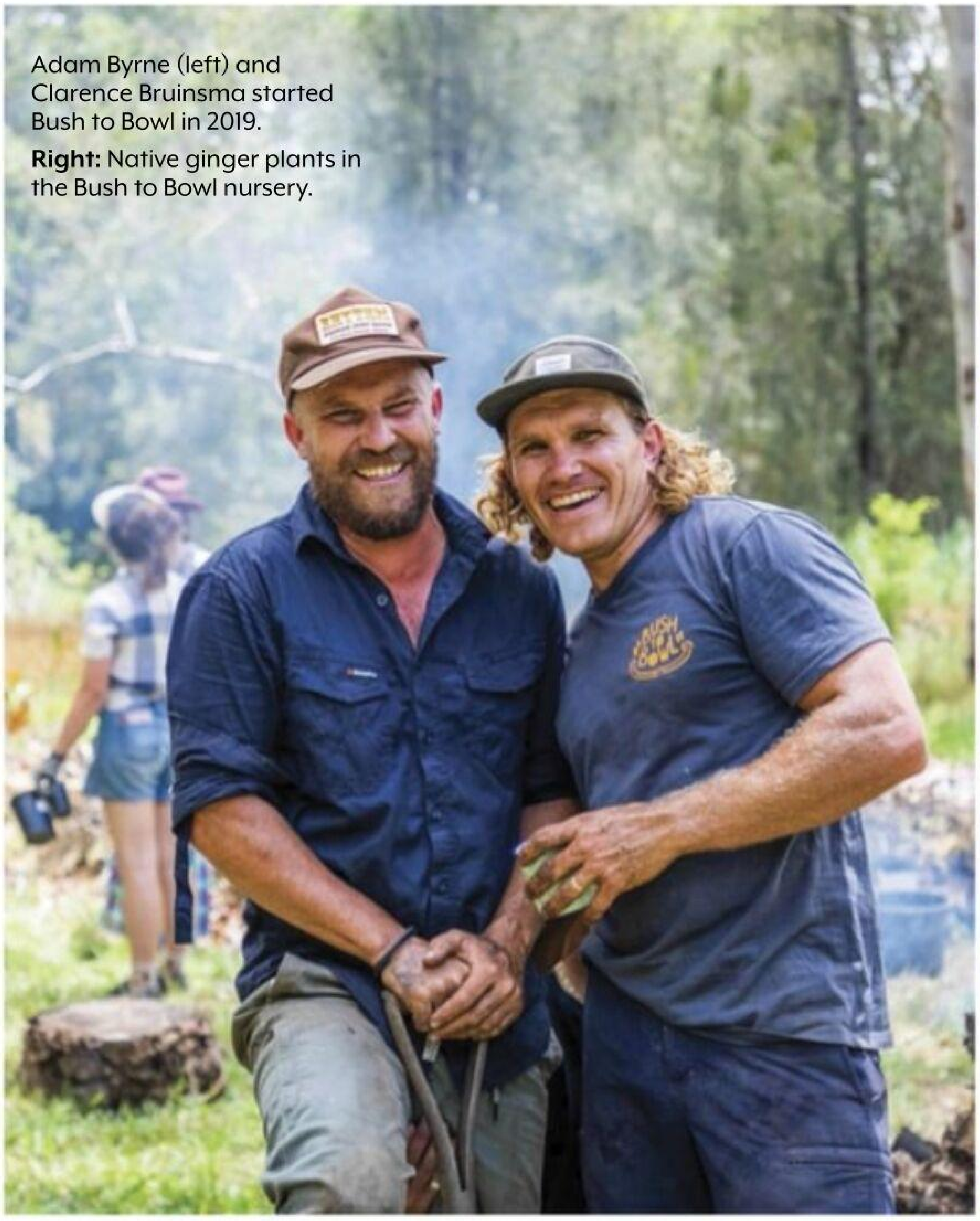


Adam Byrne (left) and Clarence Bruinsma started Bush to Bowl in 2019.

Right: Native ginger plants in the Bush to Bowl nursery.

Growing together

Jacqueline Forster visits two First Nations-owned social enterprises that grow and sell traditional bushfoods, helping to foster a better understanding and greater awareness of culture and Country.

PHOTOS: BUSH TO BOWL/ RIGHT: CHLOE GRABHAM

Bush 'tucker' is a growth industry in Australia with the culinary, medicinal and aesthetic qualities of native edible plants celebrated by chefs, nutritionists and home gardeners alike. Now, more First Nations people are taking the production of traditional bushfoods into their own hands.

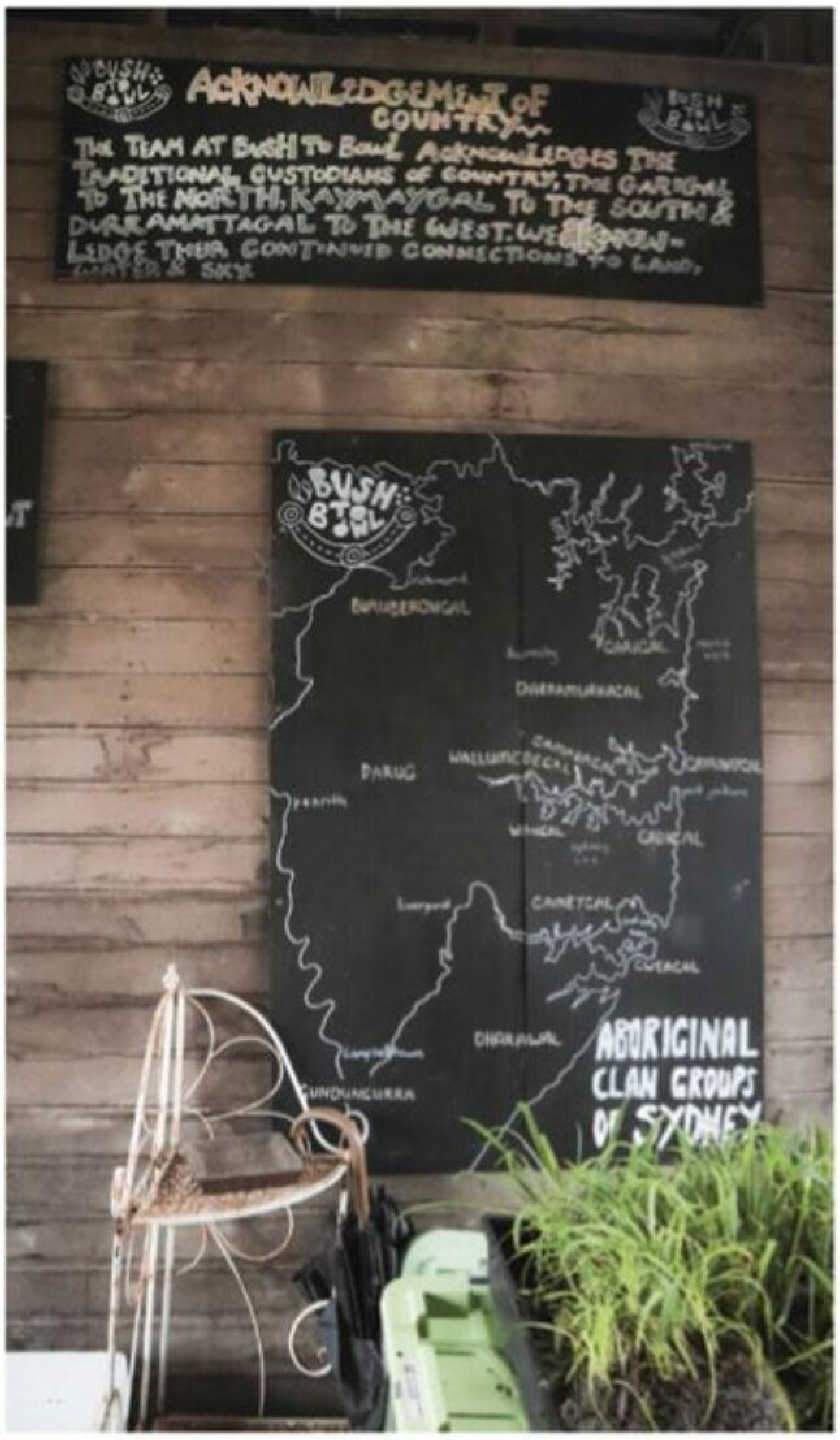
For Adam Byrne, food is a universal language, one that connects people to culture, Country, and each other. The Garigal man started Bush to Bowl in 2019 with friend and business partner Clarence Bruinsma, of Yaegl heritage.

"Clarence and I were yarning about food sovereignty around traditional foods and how so few of our mob were involved in native nurseries and bush food production. At that time there was only about 1.5 per cent of mob in the whole industry. You could count the amount of First Nations run nurseries on one hand."

The pair were already growing bushfoods at home and had set up a greenhouse at a school where Adam was engaged to construct a garden, so when other schools started booking them to create bushfood

Bush to Bowl run workshops at their nursery and on Country.

Right: Education about the connection to country is important.


BUSH TO BOWL
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY
THE TEAM AT BUSH TO BOWL ACKNOWLEDGES THE TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF COUNTRY, THE GARIGAL TO THE NORTH, KAYMAYGAL TO THE SOUTH & DURRAMATTAGAL TO THE WEST. WE ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR CONTINUED CONNECTIONS TO LAND, WATER & SKY.
BUSH TO BOWL
DARUG
GARIGAL
ABORIGINAL CLAN GROUPS OF SYDNEY

gardens Adam decided to leave his landscaping business and launch Bush to Bowl with Clarence.

"I've always loved Country. I was an active kid who grew up playing in the bush and surfing at the beach, but it wasn't until I went to Canada on a working visa and met a couple of environmental scientists that I really started to think about community and eating locally. They introduced me to a book called *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* by Bill McKibben, which focused on those themes. I loved the idea of protecting Country, and loved being outside talking to people, so I started digging into plants and growing food.

"Clarence and I had the idea to start an educational space to connect mob and community to Country and it just grew from there."

After a stint in the school garden, Adam and Clarence took a leap of faith and rented land on Garigal Country at Terrey Hills, NSW, just down the road from their current location.

"We were there for about a year when someone told us about a property nearby that would welcome us."

The land, previously owned by an Italian family who were market gardeners, was a mess of weeds but there was a large, 100-year-old shed and plenty of space for a nursery.

"Our original focus was education but now we're getting big contracts for plants we're prepping for wholesale production," Adam explains.

"We propagate our bushfood kits and landscaping plants, and I also love growing local, endemic stuff like grey box gums, geebung, midyims, cinnamon myrtle, purslane and bush basil."

Cultural connection

Adam sees food growing as a vehicle for connection and conversation.

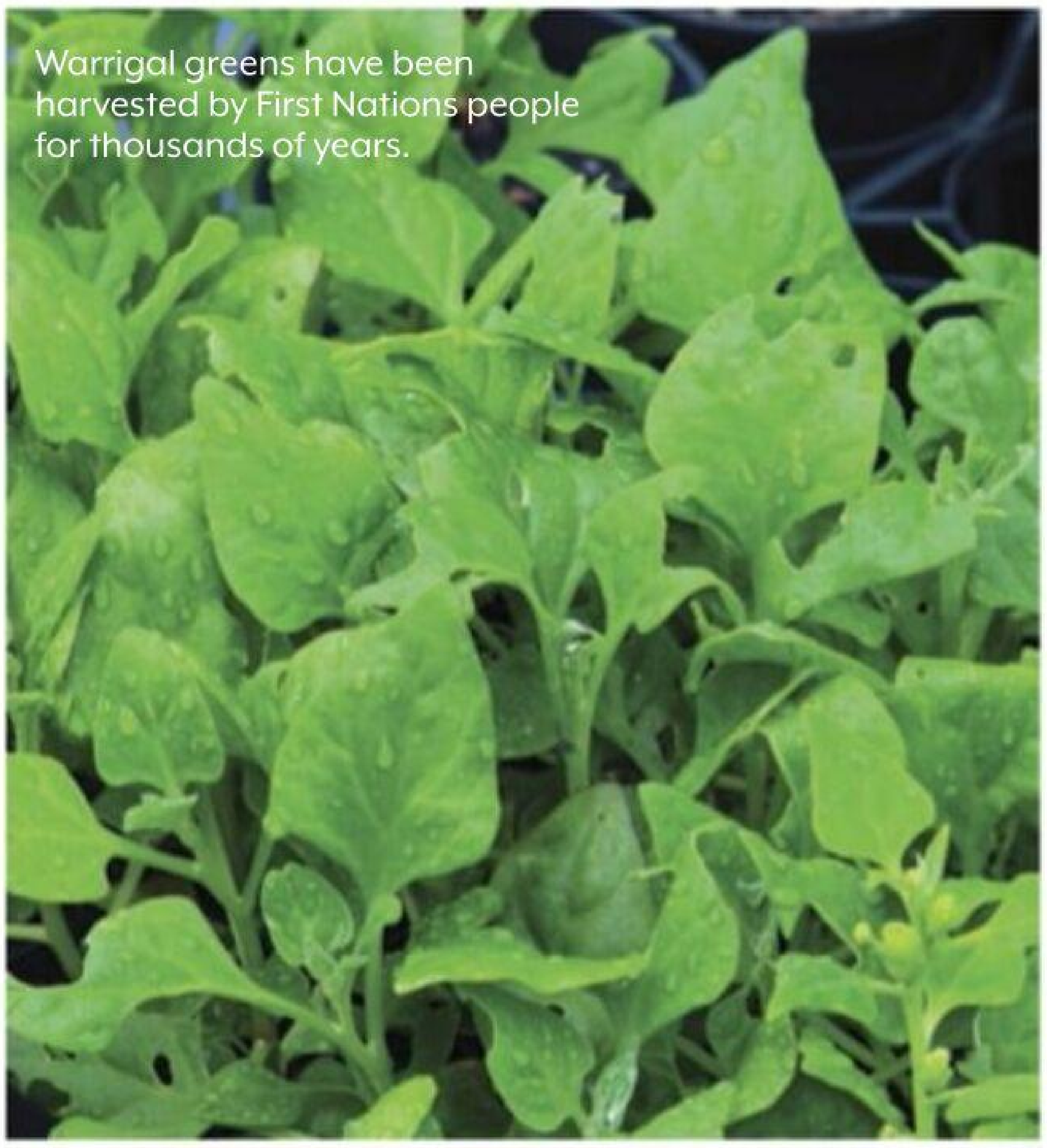
"For me, our identity in Australia is our landscape and our connection to it. And food is a big part of that. That's why we grow traditional foods because we feel it's a good conversation starter to culture.

"Food and language are the most important parts of culture. If you think of any culture in the world, food and language are at their core. And food is the

PHOTOS: BUSH TO BOWL/ RIGHT: CHLOE GRABHAM

Aunty Ceane Towers, Darug and Wiradjuri grandmother, shares traditional plant medicine knowledge with Adam Byrne.

Pigface is an edible coastal native.


Warrigal greens have been harvested by First Nations people for thousands of years.

Bush to Bowl sources their sunrise limes from the Pilbara.

best way to bring people together to have a yarn and realise that we're all just doing similar things; we all bleed red," Adam says.

"Food sovereignty is not about ownership; it's the deep-rooted connection to knowledge that we (as First Nations people) have, and the future that it can create through connection to culture which is very healing. And when I say healing, in some cases it's just a healthy focus in hard times.

"Obviously, there's been a lot of trauma in the past, in many of our families it's prolific, so for some people culture is that healthy constant in your life. And you can't have culture without food. Food is such a beautiful way to get people out on Country. And it's a safe, gentle approach into community if you are re-entering it from a harder space."

Adam would love to see the movement grow.

"Once we start to reconnect to culture the percentage of nurseries and bushfood growing could go up tenfold and that's good for everyone – for Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people because it's an inclusive culture."

Bush to Bowl run workshops at Terrey Hills and in the bush. Staff member, Cooper Darmopil-Kerslake, loves showing people where to find bushfoods.

"Some days I'm out on Country harvesting Warrigal greens and sea blight, which mostly go to the Commonwealth Bank to be used in their kitchens," he says.

The Commonwealth Bank (CBA) is a supporter of Bush to Bowl, engaging them to build a rooftop garden at their Harbour Street premises.

"We sell 15kgs of Warrigal greens to CBA every week and we have it in all our bush tucker plant kits," Cooper says, pointing out the harvesting of Warrigal greens is a relationship that's been going on for thousands of years for First Nations people.

PHOTOS: TOP LEFT: (CEANE AND ADAM) BRIGITTE GRANT FOR FOOD FUTURES CO. & EM-POWER / CHLOE GRABHAM

> Food is such a beautiful way to get people out on Country. And it's a safe, gentle approach into community if you are re-entering it from a harder space.

"It's not just take and take, a lot of these plants have evolved to benefit from harvesting, they get a boost from it. That's a big part of our job: giving back. Everyone is very conscious of how sustainable we need to be."

Sustainability is built into the organisation's ethos.

"Clarence and I don't want to preach it and not commit to it," Adam says. "It's about how we've been brought up, in that era where you did reuse stuff; you took care of yourself and your things. When I was landscaping, I didn't like seeing gardens full of exotic plants – culturally it didn't sit well with me especially being asked to spray chemicals. Our kids will drive sustainable practices because there's way more focus on environment, Country, and culture now."

Food pathways

Apart from growing their own food Adam and Clarence source native ingredients from around Australia, including Davidson Plums, wattle seed, and vibrant sunrise limes from the Pilbara.

"The elders go out on Country and harvest the fruit and we buy directly from them," Adam says.

"We try to help each other out and create food pathways across the country like the old trade lines, and not just from Blak growers. Although obviously we try to do as much as we can to create opportunities for mob, we also work with some incredible non-First Nations growers. Usually they're trying to encourage mob to come on board or they work with mob.

"We're all on that purpose driven journey and we like that way of working together because traditionally we weren't segregated. Even when Australia was colonised we lived and traded with Irish, South-East Asian, Chinese and Indian people. We're trying to do things in the old ways of not seeing people in colour, we see it as community trading skills, sharing knowledge, and giving back to Country."

The Bush to Bowl family is also important.

"We're very family oriented. Through family connections we go out and build gardens in rural schools and some of my fam in Narrandera harvest salt bush for us. When Clarence's family had a bunch of aniseed myrtles on their Country we paid them to harvest for us and come wattle seed season we'd like to see mob harvest that, too."

Adam Byrne and Anastasia Vickers planting a bushfood garden at the Blue Mountains Women's Health & Resource Centre in Katoomba.

Futureproofing

With their current location earmarked for development, Adam and Clarence are searching for a new home for the social enterprise.

"We're looking for somewhere between here (Terrey Hills) and the NSW Central Coast, which has one of the fastest growing Aboriginal populations in Australia. There is demand for youth mentoring and employment there and we want to create a safe space for our young ones to learn and be mentored. That's what I'd like to do most in the future, help youth and other organisations or start-ups. I still want to think in that local mindset.

"One of our goals is to have our own garden to teach in. We want to focus on growing food and bringing people in who are going through hard times and need community and connection to Country. Plants, like animals, don't ask anything of you – there's something about working with plants that makes you feel just a little bit lighter."

PHOTOS: TOP RIGHT: (ANASTASIA AND ADAM) BRIGITTE GRANT FOR FOOD FUTURES CO. & EM-POWER / CHLOE GRABHAM

SOWING THE SEED

Muru Mittigar is a First Nations-led social enterprise, with a nursery that has the largest Indigenous-operated native seed bank in NSW.

Nursery manager, Richard Burrell, in the retail nursery.

A sample of the seedlings grown at Muru Mittigar.

Native Parsnip
Native Parsnip

Muru Mittigar means "pathway to friends", which is the main aim of this social enterprise located on Dharug Country in western Sydney. The organisation offers employment, education, and financial counselling for local Indigenous people and all other community members, as well as Aboriginal cultural awareness programs, arboriculture and bush regeneration services, and a wholesale and retail nursery.

Executive officer, Uncle Wayne Cornish, a proud Ngiyimpaa man, oversees the Community and Cultural Education teams, working with schools and businesses.

"We organise consultations between Traditional Owners and organisations through bespoke cultural programs and cultural experiences out on Country," Wayne says. He believes it is important to educate the greater community about native plants and traditional bushfoods because it builds connection to Country and a solid foundation for culture to pass onto future generations, including non-Aboriginal people.

"Plants tell a complex story about Country that connects us to our history and our culture; they tell us about interactions with other plants and animals, and how to navigate the seasons," Wayne says.

"It's about knowledge but it's also about memories and the stories you have from your grandparents, uncles and aunties."

Nursery manager, Richard Burrell, has worked with Muru Mittigar for over 20 years in which time he has seen the demand for native plants grow exponentially.

"It's just boomed, with even big business asking how they can incorporate bushfoods into their planting," Richard says. "I think a lot of companies realise the need for, and benefit of, cultural awareness training so they're engaging with organisations like Muru Mittigar to educate them about First Nations culture and through that bush tucker plants."

Developers and town planners are also keen.

"We've got a contract for a new housing development in Pennant Hills so we're growing

Atherton raspberries are popular traditional bush foods to grow at home.

Eucalyptus *macrocarpa* (grey box) drying for Muru Mittigar's seed collection.

plants for the regeneration of the site, as well as bush tucker plants for an education space they're planning," Richard says.

"People are becoming more aware of the qualities of native plants and bushfoods. I can see them being an integral part of people's gardens and used as a substitute for exotic herbs. I use native thyme and oregano in my cooking. People just need to learn that these plants are available and are just as good as the exotic plants, if not better."

Muru Mittigar nursery grows mainly Cumberland Plains and sandstone species of the Blue Mountains and Greater Sydney Basin for regeneration, and bushfood plants for schools and retail.

Nearly all the plants are grown from seed or cuttings with staff focusing on plants endemic to the area they are going to revegetate.

"If people have the forethought, they will engage us to collect seed prior to land clearing like we did at Pennant Hills.

"If we can't get everything we need for a project on site we use seed from our bank."

Banking on it

The nursery team collect and dry seeds, before categorising and storing them at the Llandilo premises.

"We're not state of the art, everything is kept in everyday fridges, but we have a scientific licence to collect seed and cuttings and we are in the process of cataloguing them in a database with information about where and when they have been collected," Richard explains.

Propagation takes place in a polytunnel where under-bench heating and irrigation aids germination. The growing medium consists of one part open tube mix and one part sand, with a light covering of vermiculite. From there the seedlings get pricked out into tubes to grow on.

"Some plants, like lemon myrtle, are hard to grow from cuttings and some of the tea trees and melaleucas can be tricky to grow from seed," Richard says.

Murnong, or yam daisy (*Microseris lanceolata*), is one of the local plants grown from seed.

"Yam daisies are perennial tubers commonly found in alluvial soil. They don't like it too wet or too dry. Around here, First Nations people farmed yam daisy along the riverbanks. An Aunty told me the story of how careful harvesting ensured a steady supply of the important food source."

Cultivation of yam daisy was all but wiped out by colonisation and the introduction of hooved farm animals.

Wayne says creating biodiversity with endemic plants is essential for environmental sustainability.

"Plants that feed off each other contribute to the health of our land, rivers and creeks and tell the story of our connection to Country."

From the source

Some First Nations owned nurseries or bushfoods businesses you can support

- **Bush to Bowl** bushtobowl.com
- **Black Duck Foods** blackduckfoods.com.au
- **Dalki Garringa** dalkigarringa.com.au
- **Indigiearth** indigiearth.com.au
- **IndigiGrow** indigigrow.com.au
- **Mabu Mabu** mabumabu.com.au
- **Muru Mittigar** murumittigar.com.au
- **Native Spirit Nursery** nativespiritnursery.com.au
- **Warndu** warndu.com
- **Willum Warrain** willumwarrain.org.au
- **Worn Gundidj** worngundidj.org.au

PHOTOS: CHLOE GRABHAM

The apple berry thrives in a range of climates.

Bushfoods
to grow at home

Here are some flavoursome traditional bushfoods you can grow yourself.

APPLE BERRY (*Billardiera scandens*) A delicate climber with small bell-shaped flowers usually found growing underneath gum trees. Prefers well-draining soil rich in organic matter and a moderate amount of sunlight. Keep up the water during dry spells but be careful not to overwater as this can lead to root rot. Bears elongated fruit that can be used in jams, pies, and sauces.

ATHERTON RASPBERRY (*Rubus probus*) Evergreen shrub producing large sweet tasting fruit. Originating in the Atherton Tablelands, Queensland, an area known for its fertile soil, they respond well to compost.

CHOCOLATE LILY (*Dichopogon strictus*) Strappy leaved lily with highly 'chocolate' fragranced flower and edible tuber. Similar to vanilla lily, which isn't as strongly perfumed but has a higher yield. Like many native plants, chocolate lilies benefit from smoke water to help them germinate. You'll find a story from *Gardening Australia* on making smoke water here: abc.net.au/gardening/how-to/up-in-smoke/13860738

MIDYIM BERRY (*Austromyrtus dulcis*) Native to coastal areas of eastern Australia, this low spreading plant enjoys part sun and shade. Ripe berries are sweet and tangy, and can be eaten fresh, used in jams, pies, and other desserts, or added to savory dishes for a unique flavour.

Midyim berry is also known as midgen berry.
Right: Atherton raspberry.

PHOTOS: ISTOCK TOP & FAR LEFT/BOTTOM RIGHT: ALAMY

The chocolate lily has a unique fragrance.

PHOTO: ALAMY

Left (from top): Mountain pepper; yam daisy; native ginger; old man saltbush.

Above: Warrigal greens.

MOUNTAIN PEPPER (*Tasmannia lanceolata*) Medium to large bush, endemic to lutruwita/Tasmania. Requires male and female plants for fruit, however, both the leaf and berry can be used as a flavouring. The intensity of the 'pepper' flavour builds – a little goes a long way!

MURNONG OR YAM DAISY (*Microseris lanceolata*) Flowering edible tuber farmed by First Nations people and a major food source for those living along Dyarubbin (Hawkesbury River NSW – Dyarubbin means yams on the river) and the Cumberland plains (western Sydney). Colonisation and the introduction of exotic crops and livestock decimated the yam population in this region.

NATIVE GINGER (*Alpinia caerulea*) A popular and attractive plant for school and backyard gardens. Glossy leaves were traditionally used to wrap fish or meat to cook on a fire imparting ginger flavour. Has bright blue berries and grows up to two metres. The rhizome is edible. The traditional harvesting method was to split the plant, take one half to cook with and re-plant the other half.

OLD MAN SALTBUSH (*Atriplex nummularia*) Large woody shrub with silver foliage used in cooking for its natural salty flavour. Prefers well-drained soil in full sun. Drought tolerant once established but will benefit from occasional watering during dry spells.

WARRIGAL GREENS (*Tetragonia tetragonioides*) Harvested sustainably by First Nations people for tens of thousands of years. The fleshy, succulent leaves can be used as a spinach substitute or in pesto and salads. Sprawling vine can grow up to two metres.

Profiles by Bush to Bowl and Jacqueline Forster.

● See page 41 for other bushfood suppliers.

PHOTOS: ISTOCK/BOTTOM LEFT: ALAMY

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FROGS
in the city

Frogs can bring life and balance to natural systems – even in urban areas. **Karen Sutherland** explores how frogs move about, and some of the conservation projects helping them thrive.

PHOTO: VIVIAN EVANS

Frogs are important indicators of environmental health, and with the rise of mosquito-borne diseases, they have a vital role to play in keeping ecosystems in balance, including in urban areas where their protection faces many challenges.

You might wonder how frogs move in urban areas with so many obstacles and dangers. Like other wildlife, they need habitat corridors to assist their movement, which is usually done on rainy nights, between existing water sources in search of another, at about a maximum of 500m apart.

They can move along less than pristine urban green corridors, such as planted edges of railway lines and freeways. They also move through stormwater drains and as they sometimes burrow into soil, fences are not always a problem.

Although harder to track than birds and larger wildlife, there are plenty of ways you can identify and learn about frogs using apps, such as frogid.net.au, frogwatch.org.au and inaturalist.org. You can also check frog sightings in your local area at frogid.net.au/explore.

In rural areas it's also interesting to note the movement and habits of frogs. In North Central Victoria, near our family farm, I see masses of frogs on rainy nights hopping across backroads. At the farm, I find frogs hanging out in buckets, in trays of plants and in the soil, showing they are surviving despite broadacre farming.

Urban frog lessons

Years ago, I helped a Melbourne primary school in Coolaroo South build a frog bog, filled by a small rain garden, filtering stormwater. The enthusiastic youngsters built the rain garden, frog pond and surrounding native garden with love and good intentions, but the frogs were unable to respond to he welcome message. We had not studied the obstacles carefully enough. The school was separated from two local creeks by a major road, with no

Top: Kororoit Creek with seasonally dry frog bog in foreground.

Bottom right: A Frog bog at Kororoit Creek being built by volunteers.

Inset: Growling grass frog.

Facing page: An Australian green tree frog peeps out of a self-watering pot.

PHOTOS: JESSICA GERGER/ ANN STEVENS/ FROG: ISTOCK

adequate green corridor for frogs to move through. The frog bog depth was also limited by safety considerations, and with a small roof feeding the rain garden, it dried out too quickly. Lesson learned.

Later, in a landscaping project, I installed a decorative pond in a home garden only a hop, step and a jump away from Merri Creek in Coburg, an easy journey for breeding frog couples who readily moved in. Their loud calls caused neighbours to ask for frog recordings to be turned off at night so they could sleep! Planting that garden, we discovered hibernating frogs deep in the subsoil. Success!

Kororoit Creek gets growling

Another success story is the work of the Melton Environment Group and the Friends of Kororoit Creek (FOKC) in Melbourne. The latter have built three frog bogs along the creek in the last year to encourage local frog numbers and have plans for four more.

Three different frogs observed in the Kororoit Creek area are the eastern banjo (*Limnodynastes dumerilii*), growling grass frogs (*Litoria raniformis*) and the common eastern froglet (*Crinia signifera*). The last is more likely to be found in urban gardens.

You can learn more about the various projects

Peter Stroud and Ann Stevens checking beehives at the frog bog at Avondale Heights Community Garden.

Left: Frog bog under construction at Avondale Heights Community Garden.

Inset: Common eastern froglet.

each organisation is working on at their websites: fokc.org.au and meltonenvironmentgroup.org.au.

Here's a short section about the growling grass frog from the Melton Environment Group.

> This is our largest local frog. Growling grass frogs are found in a few locations in and around Melton. They can be heard calling from wetlands adjacent to Greigs Road at Strathtulloh. They can also be heard in man-made wetlands in Melton South and Caroline Springs. Its call is a low growl and is usually heard on hot evenings. A major population of growling grass frogs is found in the wetlands north of Rockbank and along Kororoit Creek…
>
> It is also endangered, mainly through habitat loss. Many wetlands have been lost to urban expansion over the last few years.

Thankfully though, a large park is being created for Kororoit Creek at the suburb of Deanside, 24km west of the Melbourne CBD, which will help protect the growling grass frog habitat (see News on page 10).

Community garden frog bog

The Avondale Heights community garden frog bog, also in Melbourne, is a great example of how an unused area can benefit people and wildlife in urban areas and especially encourage frog populations. The frog bog was created on land with a stormwater problem. Around 30 houses surround the land, many with stormwater outlets draining into it, causing seasonal flooding in one corner – perfect for a bog.

During the forward-looking garden design, this corner was designated a frog bog. Assisted by a local council grant, Alistair Ripper of Gardens of the Sun transformed this area into a haven for frogs such as the common eastern froglet.

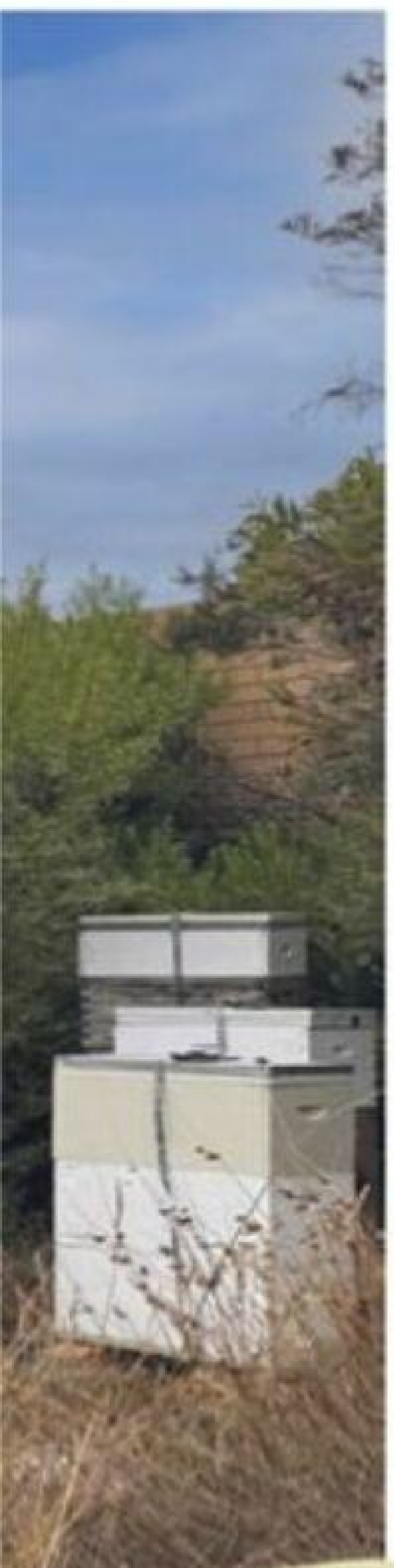
An overflow to the stormwater system prevents flooding and biodegradable jute matting initially suppressed weed growth, while indigenous plants established. In winter, the frog bog fills with water due to the use of bentonite clay, creating an ephemeral wetland. Reeds slow and clean stormwater, for the health of frogs and local waterways, and provide habitat for frog spawn.

PHOTOS: ANN STEVENS/ KAREN SUTHERLAND/ FROG: ISTOCK

PLANTS for FROGS

Add these plants to encourage frogs in your backyard.

Around ponds and frog bogs, plant mat rushes, native gingers, tussock grasses, slender knotweed (*Persicaria decipiens*) and clubby rush (*Ficinia nodosa*). **Water plants** include water ribbons, nardoo, milfoil, swamp lily (*Ottelia ovalifolia*) and swamp goodenia (*Goodenia humilis*).



Top right: Roanna Berry, a volunteer at Narrabundah Wetlands.

Inset: Eastern banjo or pobblebonk frog.

Below left to right: Mat rushes; slender knotweed flower; milfoil.

PHOTOS: ROANNA BERRY/PLANTS & FROG: ISTOCK

Wetlands go wild

ACT Healthy Waterways is a joint project of the Australian and ACT governments to protect and improve water quality in the Murrumbidgee River system, the ACT, and downstream. Frog conservation is a happy by product. The ACT has up to 25 healthy waterway projects going, designed to encourage wildlife and frogs.

Narrabundah Wetlands, in the inner south of Canberra, is one that is thriving. I was lucky enough to visit, finding flourishing reeds and sedges fringing chains of ponds that clean stormwater before it reaches local creeks, and providing habitat for water birds and frogs.

The morning I visited, the call of the common eastern froglet rang out, accompanied by a reed warbler. Broad concrete walking paths provide good access for viewing and listening for everyone.

Narrabundah Wetlands is stewarded by Landcare volunteers and is supported by the Molonglo Conservation Group.

Eight native frogs have been recorded in the Jerrabomberra Creek that flows through Narrabundah Wetlands. Among them are: plains froglet (*Crinia parinsignifera*), common eastern froglet, eastern banjo frog or pobblebonk, brown-striped frog or striped marsh frog (*Limnodynastes peronii*) and whistling tree frog (*Litoria verreauxii*).

These are just a few of the great projects helping frogs in our cities and surrounding areas. Why not check if there's a local conservation group near you working to protect them? Or investigate what you can do in your own backyard.

THREATS TO FROGS

- Clearing of native vegetation and deep litter around waterways diminishes wildlife corridors and frog habitat.
- Slow moving water is discouraged in urban settings, whereas frogs need still sections of water with reeds to spawn.
- Frogs are sensitive to pollutants in urban waterways, including litter, sediment and chemicals, so projects that filter pollutants help frogs survive.
- The chytrid fungus is an increasing problem for frogs in Australia and internationally. The fungus causes skin to peel off, affecting breathing and drinking through skin, eventually killing them. Muddy boots and tyres can spread the fungus.
- Cane toads compete with frogs for habitat and food and predate on them.
- Pest fish, such as European carp, reduce water quality and eat tadpoles. Choose native fish species for frog ponds.
- Touching frogs with bare hands can harm them.
- Climate change is altering temperature and water levels, affecting frogs adversely.
- Cats and dogs scare and kill frogs, as do vehicles.

Bring in the greenery

A new book by **Lauren Camilleri** and **Sophia Kaplan** profiles innovative homes and buildings from around the world that bring plants and gardens to the forefront of design. Here is one – Green Box in Lombardy, Italy – along with a short introduction from the authors.

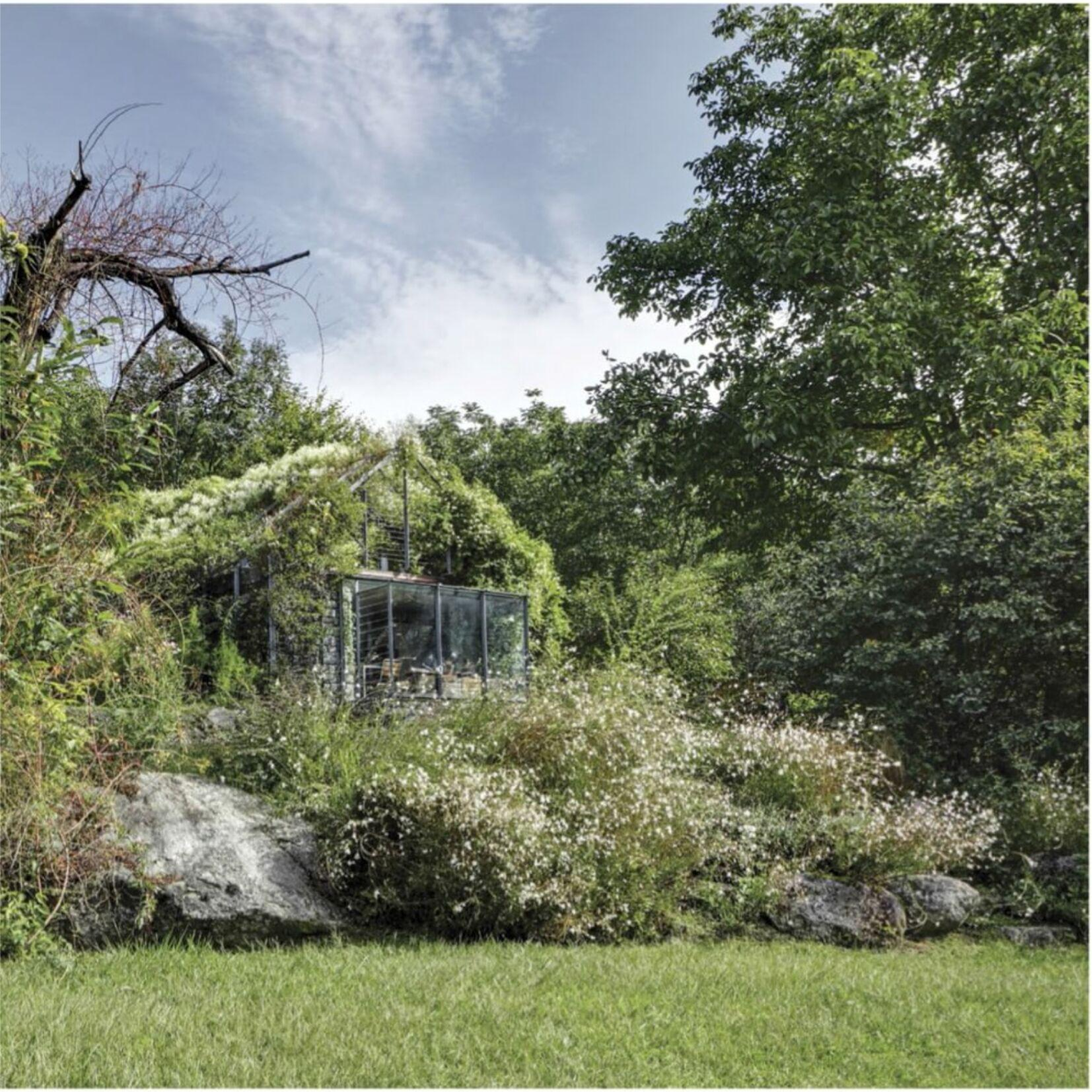
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARCELLO MARIANA

At their best, the spaces we live and work in can shape and enhance our lives in the most wonderful way. More than just serving a purely functional purpose of providing shelter from the elements or somewhere to rest our head, great architecture and design can make us happier and healthier. The inclusion of green spaces plays a huge role. Design that is in harmony with nature is good for us and our environment alike. A connection to the natural world doesn't just help us appreciate its beauty, it encourages us to take better care of it by being mindful of the choices we make in our everyday lives.

Outside In **features 25 projects that go well beyond the mere inclusion of house plants or a traditional backyard. In creating the spaces in this book, the architects, interior designers and landscape designers have placed garden and landscape at the forefront of the process, using them to guide their designs.**

GREEN BOX

This project, designed by Gianmatteo Romegialli and Erika Gaggia, co-founders of the architectural firm act_romegialli, is built onto the bones of a small disused garage that was part of a weekend house on the slopes of the Rhaetian Alps in northern Italy. The ethereal structure appears to be at one with the mountains in which it sits, engulfed in climbing vines. Sometimes wild and sometimes more manicured, Green Box, the architects attest, becomes a 'privileged observation point of the changing of the seasons' within its striking landscape.



Retaining its original stone columns, a new concrete roof was added, and lightweight metal and steel wires were wrapped around the volume of the structure, creating a support for a seemingly overgrown yet carefully designed tangle of vines to grow around.

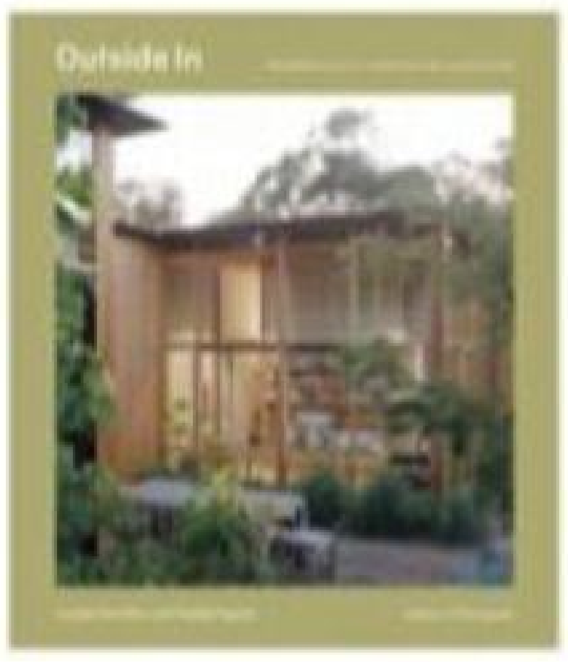
Landscape designer Gheo Clavarino, who creates gardens full of light, colour and movement, chose deciduous silver lace vine (*Polygonum baldshuanicum*) and European honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*) to provide a thick covering of green in the warmer months. Golden clematis (*Clematis tangutica*), with its striking bright yellow bell-shaped flowers and fluffy Dr Seuss-esque seed heads, and common hop (*Humulus lupulus*), with its light green cone-shaped flowers, add texture and interest to the jungle of rooftop vines.

Along the base of the structure, a mix of herbaceous perennials, annuals and bulbs ensure an almost constant show of flowers through the seasons. Gaura (*Oenothera lindheimeri*), bloody cranesbill (*Geranium sanguineum*), red valerian (*Centranthus ruber*), brown-eyed susan (*Rudbeckia triloba*),

garden cosmos (*Cosmos bipinnatus*), signet marigold (*Tagetes tenuifolia*), garden nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*) and red spider zinnia (*Zinnia tenuifolia*) create a rainbow of yellows, pinks, oranges, reds and purples.

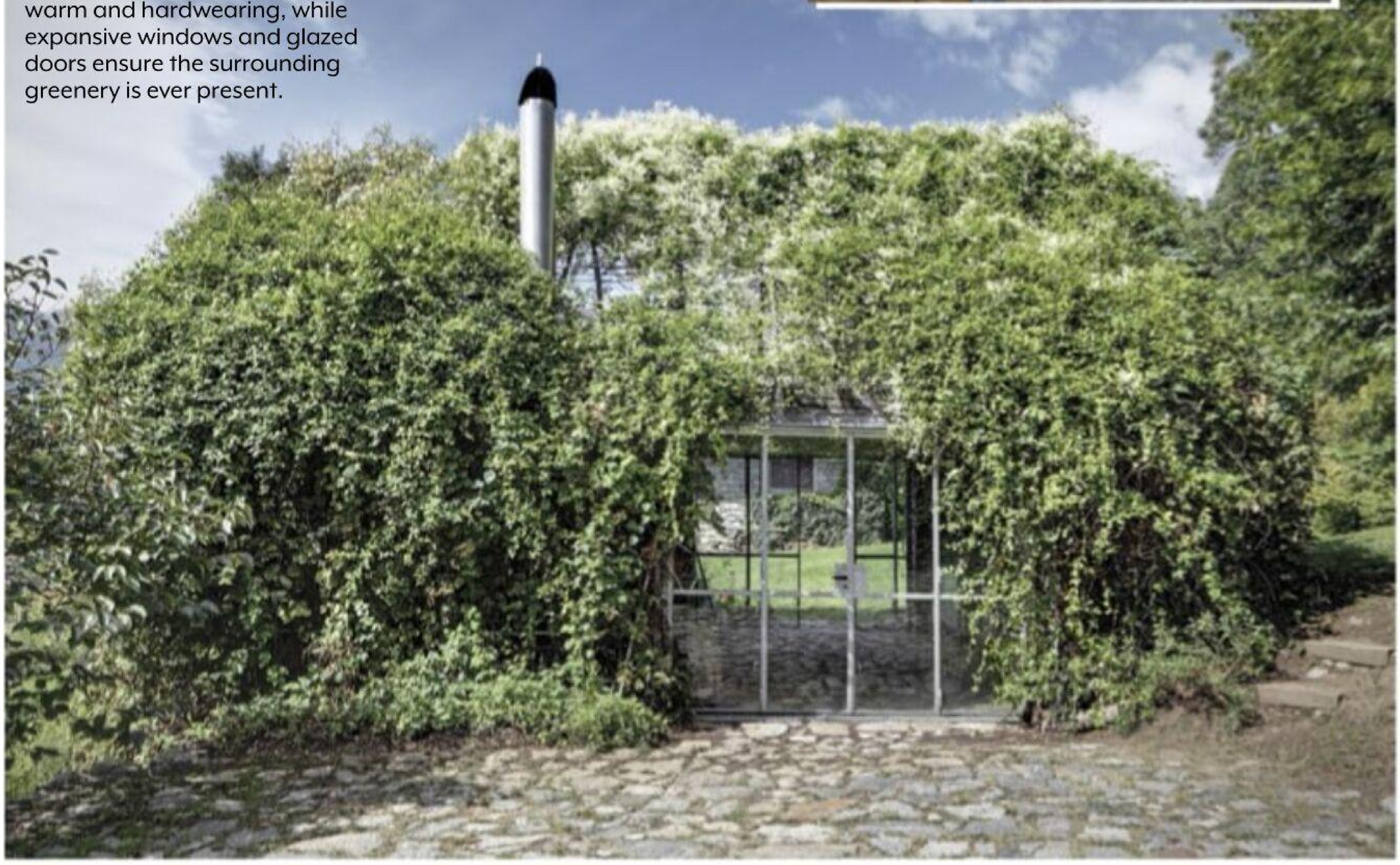
Inside the pavilion is a space to house the owner's gardening tools, a simple kitchen made of galvanised steel and an area for entertaining. Liberal use of glass and large sliding doors allow a view across the garden to the alps. During summer the vines ensure the interior remains relatively cool; in winter – once the deciduous species have lost their leaves – more light flows inside, keeping the building comfortable throughout the year. This building both gives back to and is revitalised by nature.

ARCHITECT act_romegialli
DESIGN TEAM Gianmatteo Romegialli and Erika Gaggia
LANDSCAPE DESIGNER Gheo Clavarino



Extract from *Outside In*, Sophia Kaplan and Lauren Camilleri, (Smith St Books, $65).

- See book review in our Early Autumn 2025 issue (OG 155).



Timber, concrete and the original stone columns are warm and hardwearing, while expansive windows and glazed doors ensure the surrounding greenery is ever present.

Thirsty fruiting plants, such as persimmons need regular watering.

COOL OPERATORS

Our experts provide planting ideas, pest advice and practical tips for the cool season garden.

PHOTOS: ISTOCK

Plant natives now to give them a good start.

WARM TEMPERATE

Karen Sutherland

PLANT NOW – NATIVES: Plant out tubestock and potted natives to establish root growth before winter. Dig planting holes twice as wide as the root ball and the same depth. Never plant into dry soil – fill holes with water and allow to drain and soak plant roots before planting. Tubes often have vertical ribs directing roots downward, so roots generally won't need pruning. For round pots, slit two sides of the root ball to prevent roots circling. Backfill around root ball with loose soil and gently firm around roots, removing air pockets. Water in with 5–10L to each plant and mulch the surrounding soil 50mm deep.

PEST ALERT – RATS: As nutrient dense pumpkins ripen, hungry rats begin eyeing them off for their next meal. At the first sign of nibbling, pick all your pumpkins with their stems intact and season them in a warm, dry position before storage. If you have to pick before they are fully ripe the pumpkins don't attain full flavour but can be used for stir-fries and soups. (See story page 24.)

TOP *tip*

KEEP WATERING: It's easy to forget as the weather cools that fruiting plants still need regular watering, especially those that produce in autumn. Even drought tolerant plants such as feijoas will benefit with increasing fruit size. Thirsty plants such as persimmons need regular watering to fruit well.

COOL TEMPERATE

Karen Sutherland

PLANT NOW – GARLIC: Plant garlic for autumn establishment growth. Choose a sunny position, with well-drained, slightly alkaline soil. Loosen soil to 30cm deep, incorporating well-rotted compost and manure, a sprinkle of rock dust and blood and bone. Choose early, mid and late season varieties. Separate cloves and plant pointy end up, 5cm deep, 10cm apart.

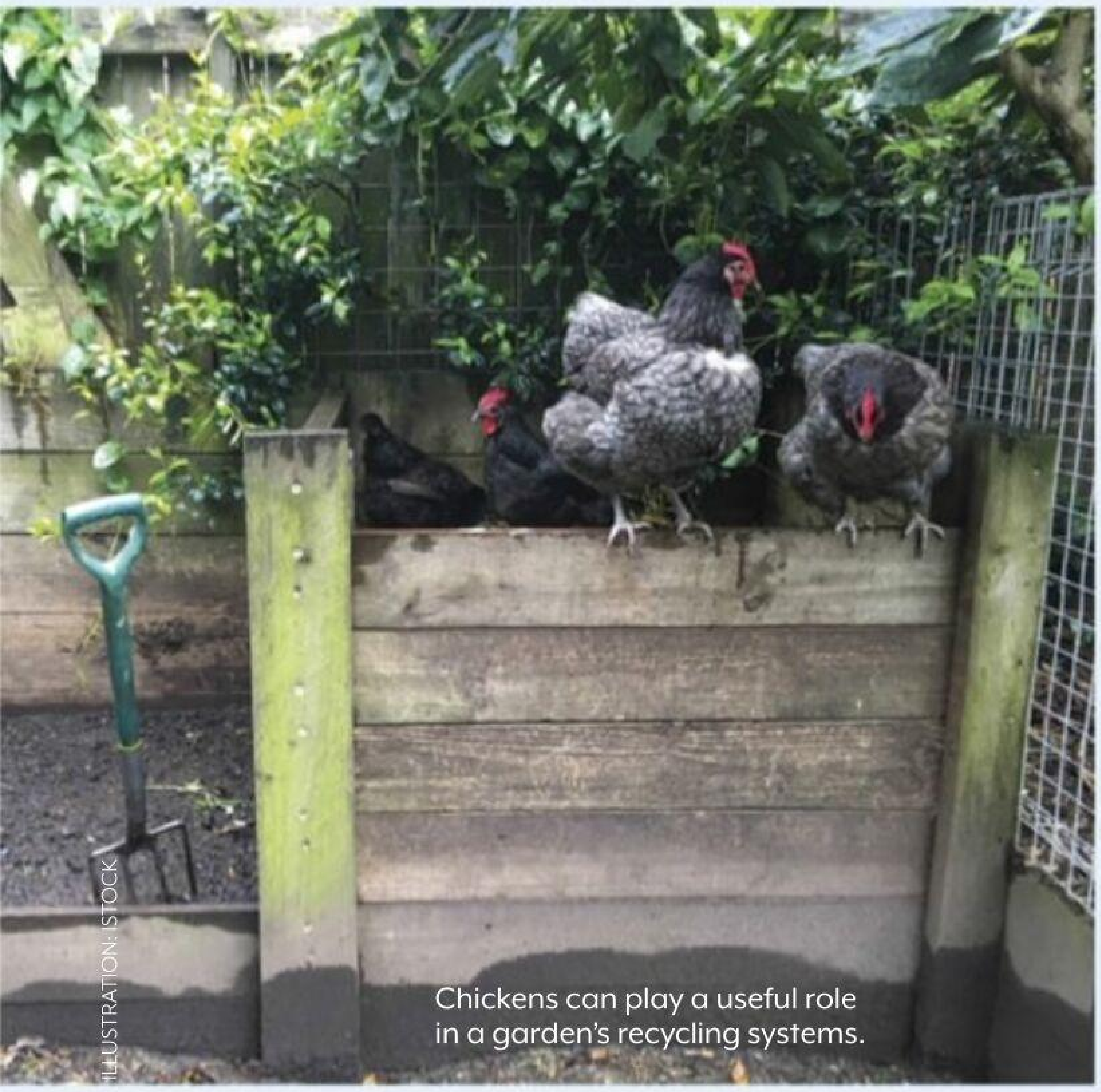
TOP *tip*

CHICKEN SERVICES: Integrating chickens into garden recycling systems is a good permaculture practice. Chickens love to forage some kitchen waste before it is turned into compost and the rest goes to worm farms and compost bins. Chickens also love a fresh worm snack from a worm farm. Used chicken bedding, full of manure, is wonderful to add to compost bins to accelerate and enrich.

PHOTO: KAREN SUTHERLAND

Above: Harvest the tops of lemongrass before they die back in cold weather.

HARVEST NOW – LEMONGRASS: Cold weather causes the tops of lemongrass plants to die back, so why not harvest beforehand? Snip above the point at where leaves emerge, avoiding thick lower stalks, which will die if cut through. Rinse leaves and pat dry, then chop into 1cm lengths for drying in a wicker basket in a cool, dark location, turning daily to avoid mould developing. Air drying like this ensures good colour and flavour retention. Once dried, keep in an airtight container in a cool, dark cupboard for up to a year.



Chickens can play a useful role in a garden's recycling systems.

ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCK

Seed Saving

Leonie Shanahan

Eggplants

Eggplant or aubergine has a very different seed-saving method to other plants. Choose a healthy eggplant and allow it to remain on the plant until it is overripe, yellow, wrinkled and soft. Remove it, cut it into cube pieces and drop it into a food processor. Cover with water and blend on low until it becomes pulp. This process agitates the seeds and dislodges them (but they are too small to be damaged). Pour this mixture into a large bowl, add more water, then scoop off any large pulp pieces. The viable seeds will sink to the bottom. Remove more pulp from the top then pour the seeds into a sieve and rinse well until only the seeds remain. Spread the seeds onto a tray to dry. Place tray in a warm, well-ventilated room out of direct sunlight, moving the seeds around frequently. When dry, package and label with, variety, date, where harvested and best time to plant. Viable for 4 years.

Create a home for insects and bugs that birds will feed on.

TROPICAL

Leonie Shanahan

HABITAT FOR BIRD FOOD: Want more birdsong in the morning or to see more birds in your day? Create a space and grow plants that attract more of their food source: bugs and beetles. Position plants at different levels – leafy trees, native shrubs, flowering plants, native grasses and ground covers. Include logs, mulch, leaf litter and don't forget some water bowls at ground level. Do not use poisons.

PEST WATCH – POT PLANTS: Are the leaves of your potted plants yellowing and sometimes curling, or are the stems going soft? You could have root rot caused by too much water, which creates perfect conditions for fungi to thrive. The remedy is to take the plant out of the pot and remove as much soil as possible. Trim the damaged roots (bin these) and place into a new pot with fresh potting mix. Sterilise your secateurs after pruning.

TOP tip

CREATE MULCH: Chop and drop overgrown vegetation to use as soil-building mulch while the soil is still damp and warm. Doing this now will accelerate the breakdown of organic matter while protecting the soil, feeding soil organisms, recycling nutrients, and conserving soil moisture. Arrowroot, pigeon pea, lemongrass and comfrey are some good plants to chop and drop. The smaller you chop it up the faster it will decompose.

ARID/SEMI-ARID

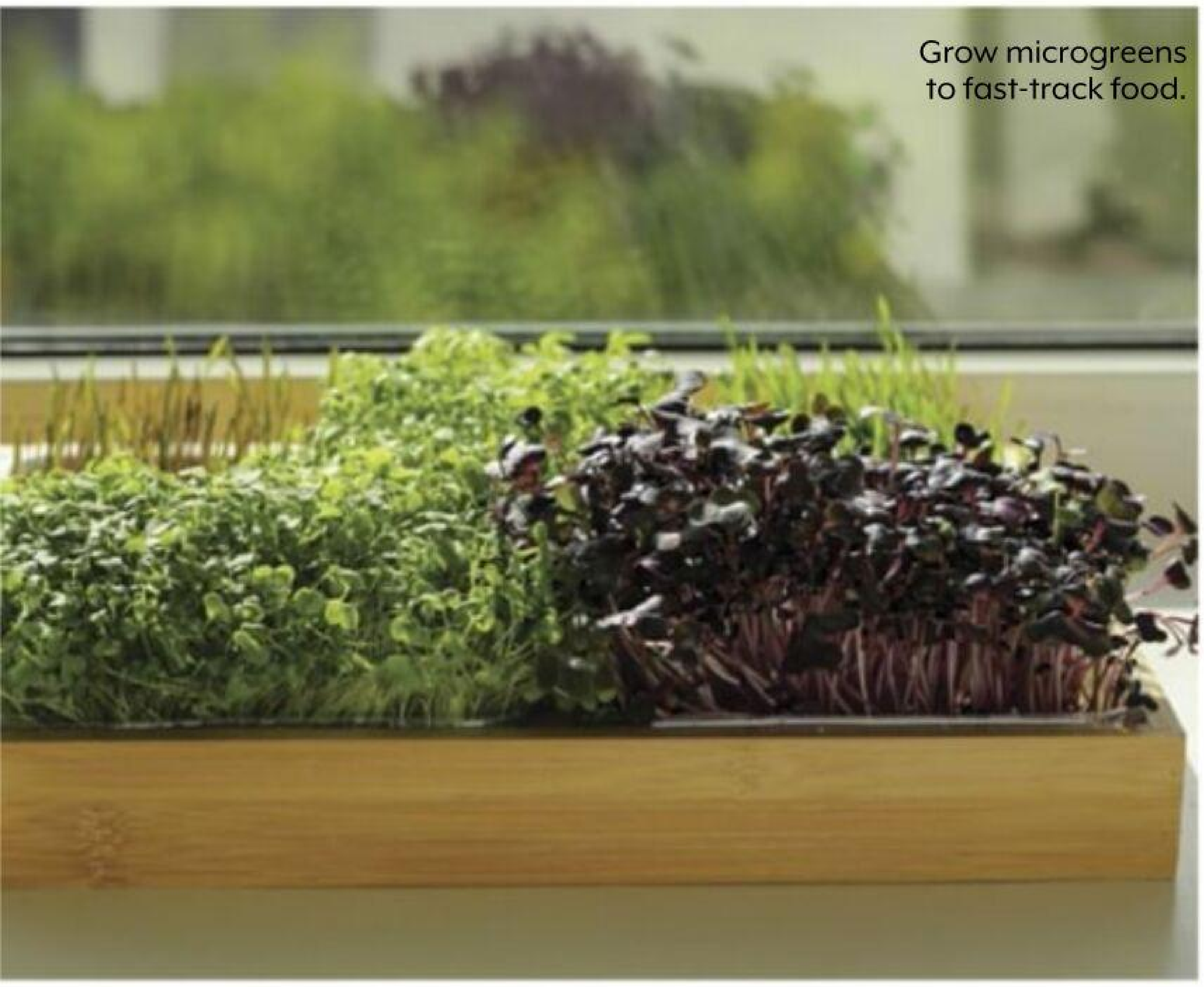
SOW ENGLISH SPINACH: This delicious and dependable leafy green loves the cool season so get plants started as soon as you feel the temperatures drop. Direct sow seed into compost enriched soil or start them in punnets. If you get a warm day, move punnets to a cooler spot or protect emerging seedlings in the ground with a shade cloth cover. Keep moist and once seedlings appear, give them a weekly soaking with diluted fish emulsion and seaweed extract mixed at half strength to encourage rapid and luxuriant leaf growth.

PEST WATCH – SNAILS: Look out for hibernating snails ready to become active as you fill your beds with seedlings of cool-season crops. Check their hiding spots – in damp, shaded areas such as under pots, dense foliage, timber boards, and rocks. Pick them by hand and dispose of them by crushing or placing in soapy water. Regularly removing potential hiding spots and maintaining garden cleanliness can further deter snail populations. A blitz now will prevent egg-laying and future infestations.

DIY

AUTUMN COMPOST: The autumn season is perfect for composting, with plenty of organic matter on hand such as fallen leaves, spent summer crops and woody prunings. Clear a spot in your composting area to make a pile or create a simple compost bay with a bunch of stakes and chicken wire. Mow autumn leaves for easy collection and to chop them up, then layer them in your compost pile with other garden waste. Keep it moist, turn it regularly, and you'll have rich compost ready for late winter/early spring planting.

PHOTO: TOP: ISTOCK/INSET LEONIE SHANAHAN/BOTTOM: PHIL DUDMAN


Grow microgreens to fast-track food.

SUBTROPICAL

Leonie Shanahan

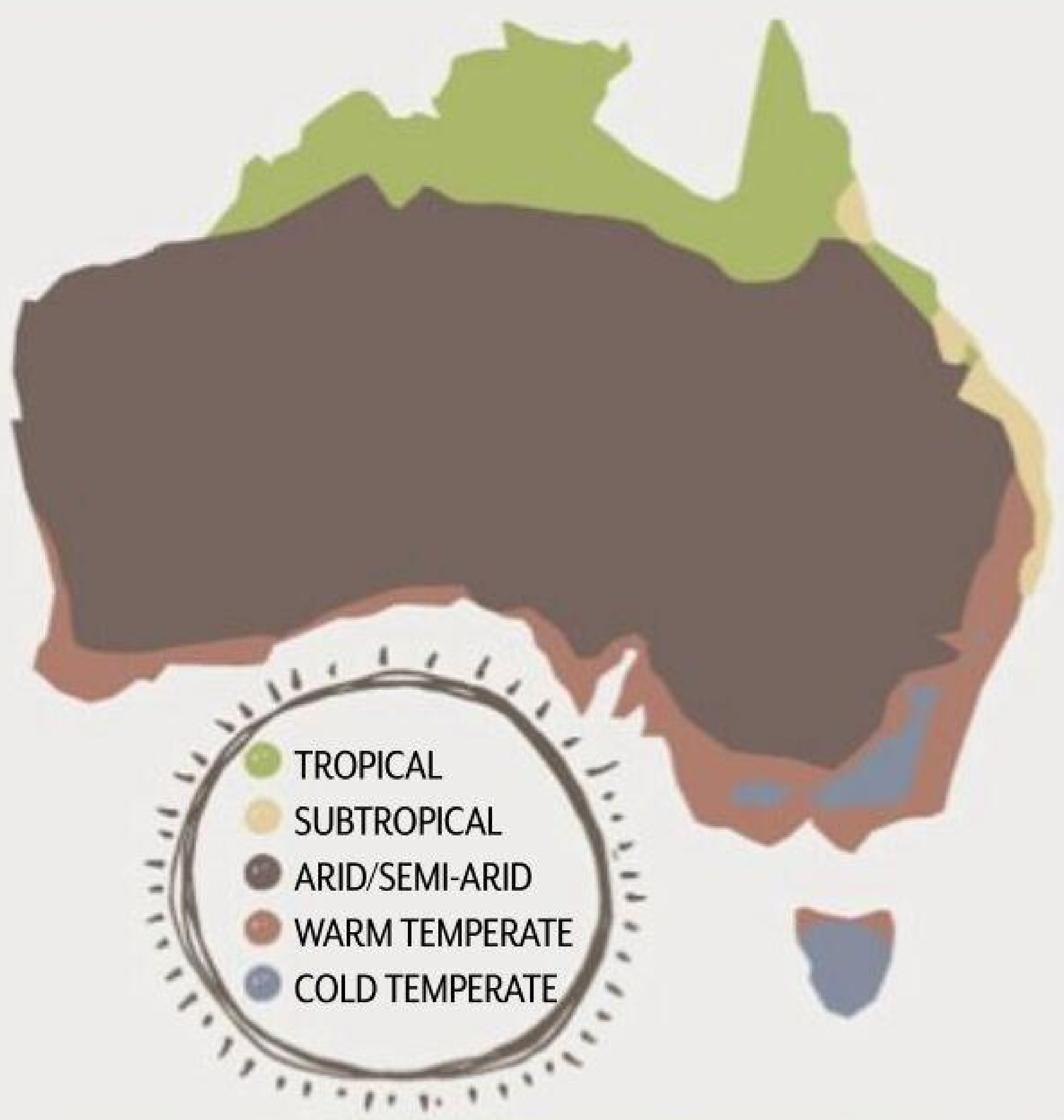
PLANT NOW – MICROGREENS: Microgreens are quick and easy to grow and can be raised outside in the sun or indoors on a windowsill. Some good plants to try include amaranth, broccoli, coriander, radish, mustard greens and peas. Fill a seedling tray or recycled fruit punnet (with drainage holes) with seedling mix, sprinkle seeds over the surface, gently pat them down and then cover lightly with more mix. Water gently and keep moist. Harvest when they develop four true leaves. Cut as required.

SEEDS – START A LIBRARY: Start saving seeds from the tastiest, and best performing plants from your summer crops, such as beans and corn. Collect when it is not raining and usually around midday when sunny. Let zucchini, squash and cucumber keep growing until overripe to save their seeds.

TOP *tip*

WICKING BEDS: Install wicking beds,which are perfect for gardeners with limited time or who travel frequently. They also offer a good option in areas where the soil is poor or there is competition from tree roots or menacing perennial weeds, such as nutgrass. Essentially, all wicking beds are a sealed unit, like a large self-watering pot, which have a water reservoir beneath the soil to draw moisture upwards via capillary action. This ensures consistent hydration for plants, while reducing water wastage and frequency of watering. There are different types available commercially or you can build your own.

PHOTOS: ISTOCK



WHAT TO PLANT AND SOW NOW

Plant/Sow	April				
ARTICHOKE		🟡	🟤	🔴	🔵
ASIAN GREENS	🟢	🟡		🔴	
BEANS: FRENCH/CLIMB	🟢	🟡			
BEETROOT	🟢	🟡	🟤		
BROAD BEAN		🟡	🟤	🔴	🔵
BROCCOLI	🟢	🟡	🟤	🔴	🔵
BRUSSELS SPROUTS			🟤	🔴	🔵
CABBAGE	🟢	🟡	🟤	🔴	
CARROT	🟢	🟡	🟤	🔴	🔵
CAULIFLOWER	🟢	🟡	🟤	🔴	🔵
CELERY/CELERIAC	🟢	🟡	🟤	🔴	
EGGPLANT	🟢				
ENGLISH SPINACH		🟡	🟤	🔴	🔵
GARLIC	🟢	🟡	🟤	🔴	🔵
HERBS/MEDITERRANEAN	🟢	🟡	🟤	🔴	🔵
KALE	🟢	🟡	🟤	🔴	
KOHLRABI	🟢	🟡	🟤	🔴	🔵
LEEK	🟢	🟡		🔴	🔵
LETTUCE	🟢	🟡	🟤	🔴	🔵
ONION		🟡	🟤	🔴	🔵
PEAS		🟡	🟤	🔴	
RADISH	🟢	🟡	🟤	🔴	🔵
SILVERBEET	🟢	🟡		🔴	
SPRING ONION	🟢	🟡	🟤	🔴	🔵
STRAWBERRY PLANTS	🟢	🟡			
SWEDE	🟢	🟡	🟤	🔴	🔵
TOMATO	🟢	🟡			
TURNIP	🟢	🟡	🟤	🔴	🔵

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the best of your ABC

Tony Armstrong with members of the Kiwirrkurra community.

Eating the problem

Australia has one of the highest mammal extinction rates in the world, in large part due to animals introduced by humans (rabbits and camels, for example). The new ABC program, *Eat The Invaders*, takes a thoughtful and entertaining look at the problem. Host and culinary adventurer Tony Armstrong, travels the country, talking with ecologists, indigenous rangers and invasion biologists, assessing the damage done by these predators. Researchers are looking at scientific solutions but this series offers another option: we could eat the invaders.

Over six episodes, Armstrong is joined by Kirsha Kaechele, artist and curator at Hobart's Museum of Old and New Art (Mona), who is a champion of creative ways to turn trash into treasure. In this series, they enrol the help of chef Vince Trim to turn unwanted pests into a new food source.

The first episode considers rabbits, which were introduced back in 1859 by a Victorian pastoralist for hunting. It didn't take long for the 24 wild rabbits to breed and become a plague that is still a problem today as they compete with native animals for food and shelter. Although rabbits used to be a menu staple, they are not readily available these days.

Another episode looks at cats. The issue of feral cats is considered but the way we humans control the domesticated animals is also questioned. In terms of recipes featured? Cats are not on the menu, just the results of their predatory nature.

The series is a blend of history, science and creative dishes, along with quite a few laughs as taste testers, such as chef Poh Ling Yeow and the ABC's Dr Karl, are brought into the mix. There are some tummy turning scenes when it comes to killing and cooking these animals, which viewers might want to prepare for, but it's definitely worth asking the question: what would you eat to help save our diverse environment?

> You can watch *Eat The Invaders* on ABC iview.

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welcome to ORGANIC LIVING

Inside: HEALTHY HEMP ★ LISTEN TO THE EXPERTS ★ HERBAL TEAS

Learn about travellers like McHaley Ho who experience farming life as WWOOFers, page 74.

PHOTO: GREGORY LORENZUTTI

A garden to nourish

A new book celebrates the history of John and Sunday Reed's property, Heide, with recipes from Australian chefs inspired by ingredients from the kitchen gardens.

In 1934, John and Sunday Reed bought a former dairy farm in Heidelberg, Victoria – an area now considered part of Melbourne city. Their vision was to start an artistic community living in harmony with the earth. The gardens they created remain alongside the Heide Museum of Modern Art, retaining a mix of flowers, fruit trees, vegies, native plants and trees.

Former kitchen gardener at Heide, Alice Crowe, and designer Maximilian, have created *A Heide Harvest* to celebrate the Reeds, the gardens, and their legacy. Here is a short excerpt from Alice's introduction, and then three recipes to devour.

A VIEW FROM THE GARDEN

Food is precious. I suspect that Sunday Reed, the determined, visionary woman who – with her husband John – was both a force in the world of modern art and an accomplished and devoted gardener, understood this even before she set about creating her kitchen gardens at Heide. I never met Sunday, but as I tend to the gardens she established, it's impossible not to get a sense of the enormous dedication she gave to her precious garden.

Over her almost 50 years of living at Heide, she created three kitchen gardens, two of which still stand and are working gardens today: the first, adjacent to the farmhouse where the Reeds first lived on the grounds, is known as the Heide Cottage kitchen garden; the second she created in the 1960s when the couple moved into the modernist house they built together, now known as the Heide Modern kitchen garden; and the third, no longer in existence, she created near the end of her life by the farmhouse and the big Algerian oak tree known as John's oak.

Amidst the privations of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Heide kitchen gardens still required tending.

Alice Crowe, tends the gardens established by Sunday Reed.

Plants continued to grow; fruits and vegetables, herbs and flowers needed harvesting. Typically, the kitchen garden supplies the Heide Kitchen, our on-site restaurant, but as hospitality venues closed during the lockdowns of 2020–21, we found ourselves with an abundance of produce; a gift we could share with community groups and our own staff.

This unexpected opportunity planted the seed of a question in our minds: what became of the produce we gave away? What diverse dishes were being created from the ingredients we'd distributed? And beyond this, what would happen if we invited chefs from Melbourne's internationally renowned hospitality scene to be inspired by our garden's produce, the museum's art collection and the cultural legacy of Heide? It was a thrilling, if intimidating, proposition. This book is the fruit of that idea, lovingly captured by Robyn Lea's sumptuous photography.

Alice Crowe

Author note on recipes: "Although the recipes in this book have been created by experienced professionals, the home cook has always been kept in mind. The techniques you'll discover herein are attainable at home.

"Our contributors have used ingredients directly from, or inspired by, the heirloom varieties grown in the Heide kitchen gardens, but all recipes have been tested using readily sourced ingredients."

Mushroom bourguignon

Serves 4

1kg Swiss brown mushrooms, cups intact
100g salted butter, melted
2½ tablespoons olive oil
8 pearl onions or baby onions, peeled
4 garlic cloves, chopped
1 large leek, cut in half, sliced into 1.5cm thick rounds
2 carrots, cut in half across the width, then cut again into 5cm batons
3 celery stalks, trimmed and cut into 5cm batons
25g dried porcini mushrooms, soaked in 250ml (1 cup) warm water
2 bay leaves
2 sprigs thyme
2 strips of orange peel
375ml (1½ cups) pinot noir, simmered until reduced by half
½ teaspoon salt
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Wipe the mushrooms clean and trim the bases of the stalks so they are level with the mushroom cup.
2. Combine the butter and oil. Pour half the mixture into a wide heavy-based saucepan over medium heat, reserving the other half.
3. Saute the mushrooms until they have a little colour, then set aside in a bowl. Saute the pearl onions until they are lightly caramelised, then add to the mushrooms.
4. Add the remaining butter and oil mixture to the pan and saute the garlic until golden. Add the leek, carrot and celery, and stir well to colour evenly. Add the porcini and the soaking water, the bay leaves, thyme, orange peel and pinot noir. The liquid should just reach around the vegetables, but not cover them. If you need more liquid, add a little extra water.
5. Add the salt and top with a cartouche (a circle of baking paper that fits snugly into your pan). Simmer gently until the liquid has reduced and the vegetables are tender but not mushy. Season with salt and pepper, remove the thyme sprigs and bay leaves and serve with the mushrooms and caremelised onions. It goes well with celeriac puree.

Dianne Kerry, STREAT, Collingwood

Celeriac puree *serves* 4

100g butter
1kg celeriac, peeled and chopped into 1cm cubes
400ml milk
2 green apples, peeled, cored and sliced
Pinch of freshly grated nutmeg
Sea salt and white pepper

1. Heat the butter in a small frying pan over low heat and add the celeriac. Saute for 6–12 minutes or until lightly caramelised edges are visible and there is a nutty smell from the slightly browned butter. Add the milk and apple and top with a cartouche (a circle of baking paper that fits snugly into the pot). Simmer for 10–15 minutes until the apple and celeriac are completely soft.
2. Drain, reserving any remaining milk. Blend the celeriac mixture in a blender, adding the reserved milk little by little until you get a smooth, fluffy puree (take care not to add too much milk or it will turn mushy). Season with nutmeg, salt and pepper and serve.

Nothing says picnic quite like a pie, and this one adds a healthy amount of vegetables to your spread. Plus, you can serve it warm, at room temperature or even chilled. The unusual pastry is not only vegan but is surprisingly sturdy, yet moist and clean to cut, making it ideal to transport in a picnic hamper. The wine adds a delicious richness and full-bodied flavour to the pastry that is surprising considering the lack of any butter or other animal fat. Serve with dressed leaves and a daub of tomato chutney.

The filling uses cheddar, but parmesan, pecorino or any other hard cheese or vegan cheese will work (you can also leave it out completely, if you like). If using nettles, use gloves to handle them until cooked. Cooking the nettles will remove their sting.

Rose Richards and Dom Gattermayr, Florian, Carlton North

Picnic pie

Serves 6

Pastry
400g plain flour
100ml olive oil
100ml white wine
Pinch of table salt
1 egg
Sea salt

Pie filling
500g kipfler potatoes, peeled
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 leek, roughly chopped
1 shallot, roughly chopped
1 bunch small spring onions, roughly chopped
2 bunches greens (spinach, Warrigal greens, nettles), washed but not dried, chopped if necessary
150g ricotta
2 eggs, beaten
200g cheddar, coarsely grated
1 tablespoon sea salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black or white pepper
1 bunch parsley, leaves picked and roughly chopped

1. To make the pastry, combine the flour, olive oil, wine and salt in a large bowl and knead until the dough forms a smooth ball. Cover with plastic wrap and set aside to rest for 30 minutes.
2. While the dough is resting, make the pie filling. Add the potatoes to a large saucepan and cover with slightly salted water. Bring to the boil, then reduce to a simmer and cook for 10–15 minutes or until potatoes are soft. Strain, and let the potatoes cool slightly before cutting into small rounds.
3. Heat the vegetable oil in a frying pan over medium heat. Add the leek, shallot and spring onion and cook for a few minutes or until translucent. Add the greens and cook briefly. Depending on how sturdy the greens are, the cooking time will vary: for spinach, Warrigal greens or nettles this should only take 2 minutes. The residual water from the leaves should be enough to stop them drying out in the pan, but if not, just add a little more.
4. Preheat the oven to 190°C.
5. In a large bowl, mix the ricotta, egg, cheese, salt and pepper. Squeeze any excess water from the greens and break apart before adding to the ricotta mix. Add the leek mixture, parsley and sliced potato and mix well, evenly dispersing all the vegetables.
6. You'll need two-thirds of the dough to form the base of the pie, reserving the remaining one-third for the lid. Roll out the dough for the base to a 40–50 cm round, around 2–3 mm thick (the pastry is sturdy, so it can be rolled quite thinly). Line the base of a shallow 30cm round baking tin or pie dish with pastry, leaving a little overhang. Spread the filling evenly over the base.
7. Roll the remaining pastry into a round shape for the lid. Place on top of the filling and pinch to seal the edges with the overhanging pastry from the base. Pierce the lid every few inches with a fork or the tip of a sharp knife. Beat the egg, then brush the lid and visible sides with egg wash. Sprinkle some sea salt on top and bake for 45 minutes or until the top is golden. Remove from the oven and allow to cool.

PHOTO:ROBYN LEA

Sunday and John Reed, 1943.
Photo by Albert Tucker.

Originally, the fruit trees planted in the front orchard at Heide were relocated from nearby orchards that were being cleared for residential development during the 1930s. Sadly, most died during a prolonged drought in the 1960s; however, the garden has since been replanted with apples and pears, including the reinstatement of some of the original varieties. This recipe is a lovely way to make the most of pears when they are in season and abundant. When poached, they make an elegant dessert or a delicious addition to muesli for breakfast or brunch. The saffron and wine combination gives them their delicate colour.

Dianne Kerry, STREAT, Collingwood

Heirloom pears poached in white wine saffron syrup

Makes 12

12 pears, preferably red anjou or beurre bosc
4 lemons
1.5kg white sugar
1.25 litres water
250ml (1 cup) white wine
20 strands saffron
2 star anise
1 cinnamon stick
1 orange

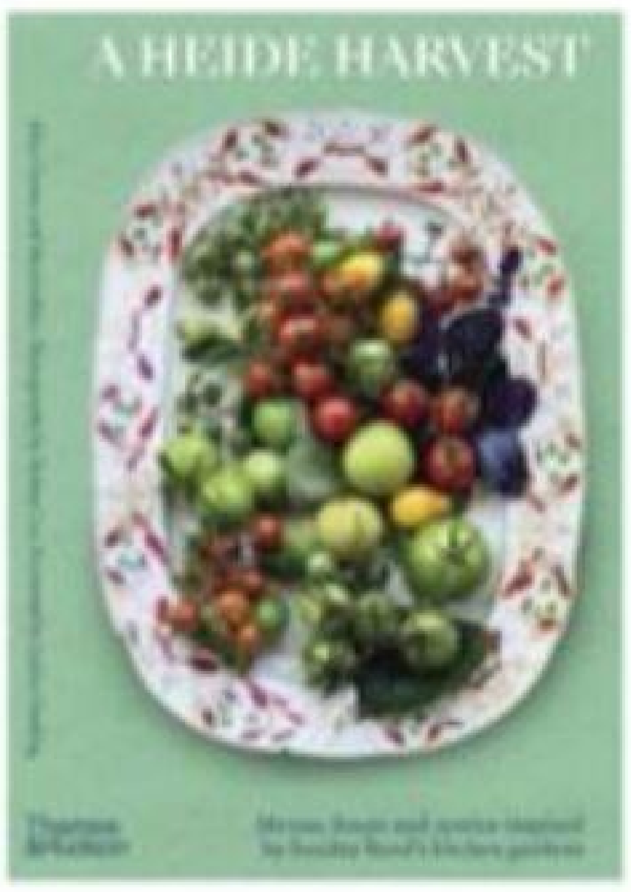
1. Peel the pears and, using a melon baller, scoop out the seeds from the bottom of each and discard. Place the pears in a large bowl and add enough water to cover them. Squeeze the juice from three of the lemons into the water and slice the squeezed halves into quarters. Add to the bowl and set aside.

2. Combine the sugar, water and wine in a large saucepan and bring to the boil. Once boiling, remove about 250 ml (1 cup) of the liquid and combine in a separate bowl with the saffron, star anise and cinnamon. Set aside to infuse.

3. Remove the peel from the orange and remaining lemon in strips and add to the saucepan. Cut the peeled orange and lemon in half and squeeze the juices into the pan. Remove the pears from the lemon water and place in the saucepan. Cover with a cartouche (a circle of baking paper that fits snugly in the pan, keeping the contents submerged) and gently simmer for approximately 10 minutes or until the thickest part of the pear is just yielding to a knife. Once the pears are cooked, remove from the saucepan and discard the cooking liquid and citrus peel. Place in a container that can be stored in the refrigerator.

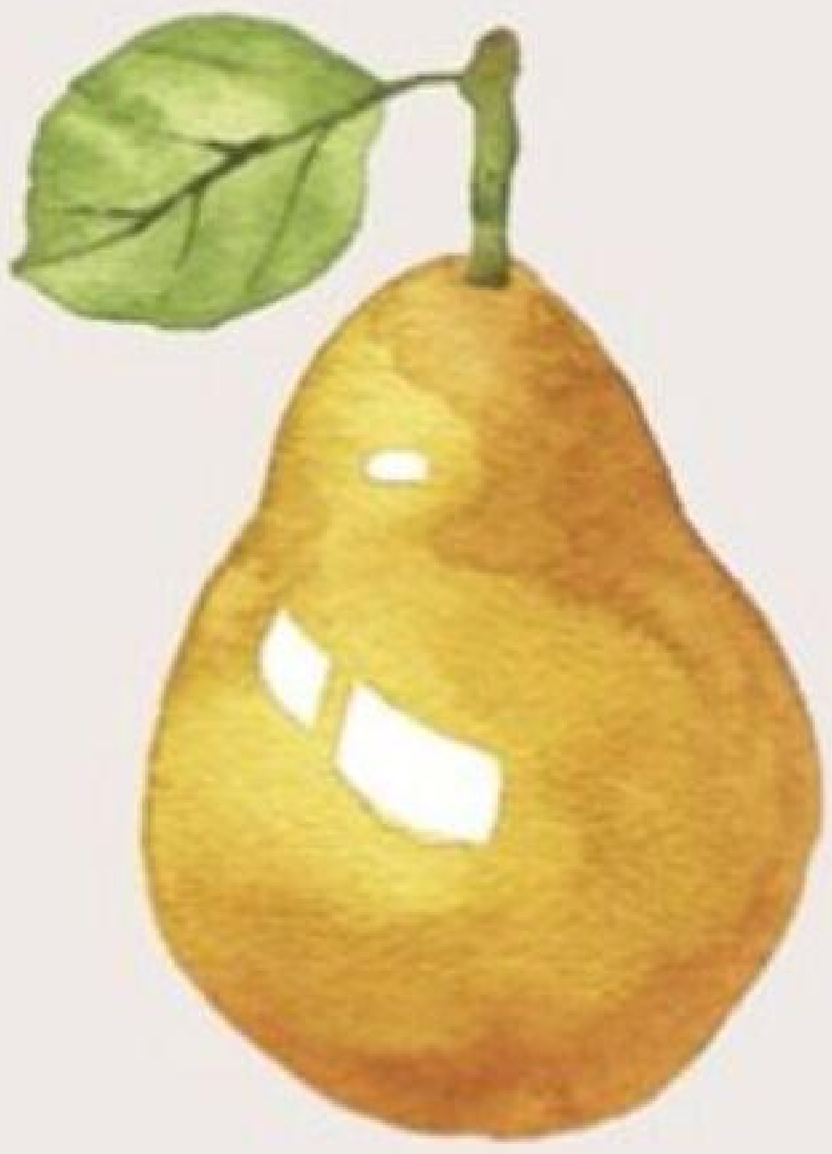
4. Add the saffron syrup to the pears and set aside to cool.

5. Serve the pears chilled or at room temperature. Store in the refrigerator for up to 5 days.



Recipes and introduction from *A Heide Harvest*, Alice Crowe and Maximilian (Thames & Hudson Australia, 2025, $64.99). Photography by Robyn Lea.

HARVEST NOTES



Pear

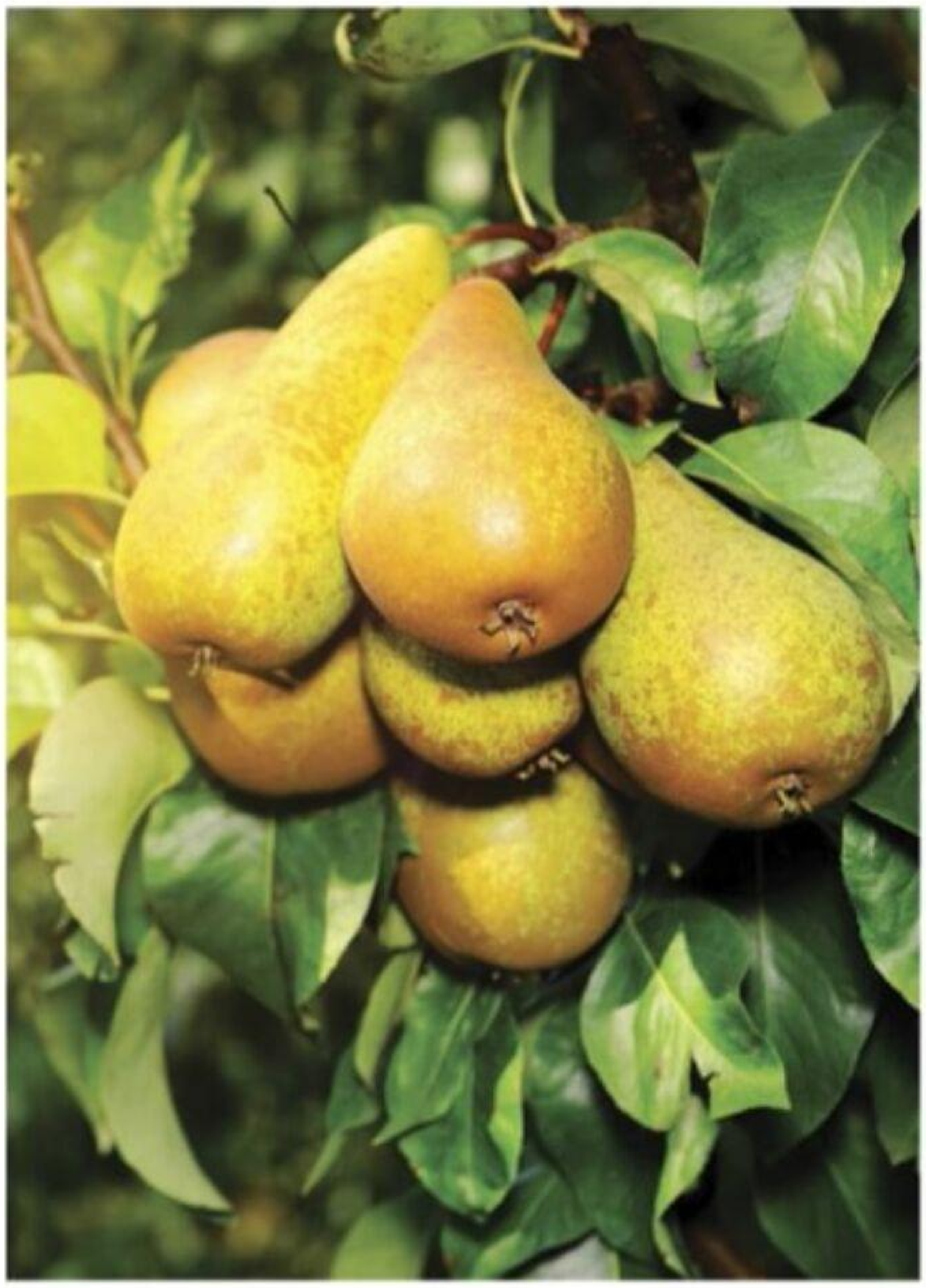
Pears are ready to pick when they feel firm but separate easily from the branch when lifted gently. Don't wait for full ripeness on the tree – they sweeten perfectly after a few days indoors. Store in a cool, dry spot or refrigerate to keep them fresh longer.

Okra

Harvest okra when pods are 5–10cm long – while they are young and tender. Check daily, as they grow quickly after flowers are pollinated. Use garden scissors to avoid damaging the plant. Store pods in a breathable bag in the fridge for up to a week, or freeze for longer storage.

Lemongrass

Harvest lemongrass stalks that are about 1–2cm thick at the base and firm to the touch. Cut stalks close to the ground with a sharp knife. Remove tough outer leaves and save the tender core. Use immediately or store in the fridge for up to two weeks or freeze for longer freshness.



IN SEASON

Fruit

AVOCADO
APPLE
APRICOT
BANANA
BLUEBERRY
DRAGON FRUIT
CHERRY
FIG
GRAPE
LYCHEE
MANGO
MELON
NECTARINE
PEACH
PEAR
PINEAPPLE
RAMBUTAN
RASPBERRY
STRAWBERRY

Vegetables

BEAN
BEETROOT
CAPSICUM
CARROT
CELERY
CHILLI
CUCUMBER
EGGPLANT
LEEK
LETTUCE
OKRA
PUMPKIN
RADISH
RHUBARB
SILVERBEET
SPRING ONION
SWEETCORN
TOMATO
ZUCCHINI

Herbs

BASIL
CHIVE
DILL
GINGER
LEMONGRASS
MINT
OREGANO
PARSLEY
ROSEMARY
SAGE
TARRAGON
THYME

PHOTO & ILLUSTRATIONS: ISTOCK

Health boosting HEMP

Jessamy Miller explores the rise of hemp seed products, from flour to moisturisers, and their many benefits, now backed by research.

Hemp is a powerhouse plant that is not yet being used to its full potential. The misconception that hemp is the same as marijuana is slowly but surely being changed, with hemp having many more practical uses. This hardy crop is sustainable, climate positive and amazingly versatile. And it's not just grown for fibre; hemp seeds are so rich in nutrition they are now being embraced as a dietary health booster and a naturally anti-aging skincare ingredient.

Sustainable hemp

Hemp (*Cannabis sativa*) is a hardy annual plant. It thrives best in sandy loam with good drainage and a monthly rainfall of at least 65mm. In Australia, it is grown under licence as an irrigated crop. While often confused with marijuana (*C. indica*), industrial hemp has low levels of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), so it does not have a psychoactive effect.

When it comes to sustainability, it's hard to beat hemp – it's fast growing, requires fewer pesticides and herbicides than other crops and regenerates soils by drawing on or fixing atmospheric nitrogen through a symbiotic relationship with bacteria.

The hemp plant has a strong root system that can penetrate up to 2m deep to access moisture and nutrients and when they die back they create channels in the soil that help to improve soil structure. It's ideal for carbon sequestration, too, and absorbs more CO^2 per hectare than any commercial crop. No wonder proponents claim that growing hemp could help reverse climate change!

Growing hemp

Industrial hemp has been grown for food and fibre for more than 50,000 years. Hemp fibre was traditionally used to make ropes and canvas, but various parts of the plant can be used for textiles, building materials, packaging, biofuels, oils, food and personal care products. Hemp products are now being utilised as natural and biodegradable substitutes for many synthetic materials.

PHOTOS: ISTOCK

Despite its versatility, in the 1900s hemp was outlawed across much of the world due to confusion with cannabis. Hemp can now be grown in Australia under a licence issued by state governments.

Challenges facing the growth of this crop include the strict licence conditions, its need for irrigation and a widespread lack of infrastructure for primary processing. Different farming practices are used when growing hemp for seed or for fibre, which comes from the stem.

Agrifutures Australia reported there was around 2500 hectares of industrial hemp planted by more than 500 licence holders across Australia in the 2022-23 season, but the industry is growing rapidly.

HEMP SEEDS

You might have seen small, brown hemp seeds in trail mixes or as part of high protein snack bars. Harvested from industrial hemp, with negligible THC, the seeds produce no mind-altering buzz. Instead, they are rich in protein, fibre, healthy fatty acids, antioxidants and micronutrients such as iron, calcium, zinc, potassium and magnesium.

This nutritional profile means hemp seeds are highly beneficial for health; they have been found to help protect the brain, boost heart health, lower inflammation and improve skin and hair, while fibre derived from the seed hulls can help promote gut health.

Being gluten-free and a complete source of plant protein, hemp seeds have become popular with vegans, coeliacs and those on grain-free diets.

Hulled hemp seeds

Hulled hemp seeds are the soft chewy hearts of the seeds. They have a mild nutty flavour, are loaded with fibre, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants and are a source of protein and omega 3, 6 and 9 fatty acids.

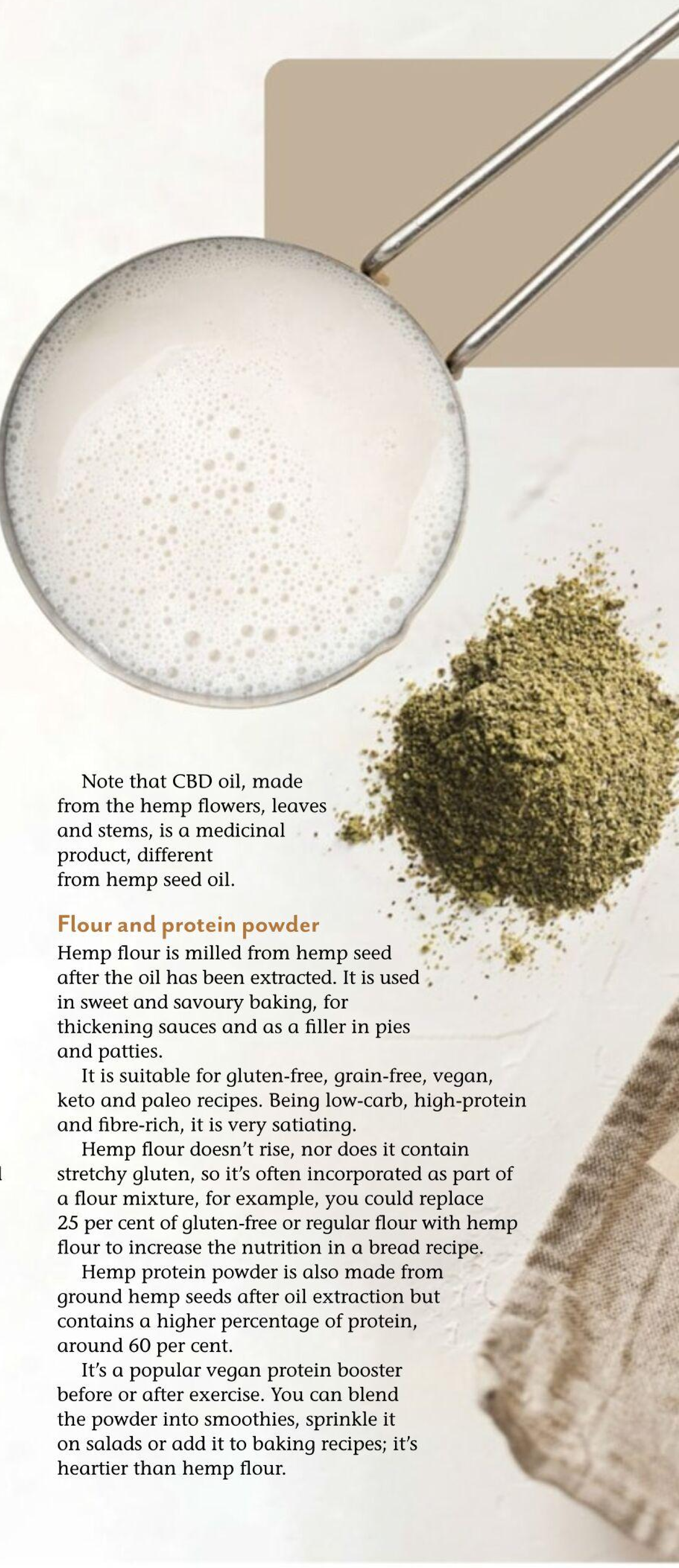
To incorporate them into your diet, add a few spoonfuls to cereals, smoothies, salads and bread and baking recipes.

The seeds are heat stable and can be dry roasted without loss of nutrition.

Oil

Hemp oil is made from cold-pressing hulled hemp seeds. It has a low smoke point so is not ideal for cooking but is generally consumed raw for its health benefits.

With a high content of omega fatty acids in the ideal ratio for health, it is believed to improve heart health and lower blood pressure and inflammation. The oil can be taken on a spoon or added to smoothies and salad dressings.



Note that CBD oil, made from the hemp flowers, leaves and stems, is a medicinal product, different from hemp seed oil.

Flour and protein powder

Hemp flour is milled from hemp seed after the oil has been extracted. It is used in sweet and savoury baking, for thickening sauces and as a filler in pies and patties.

It is suitable for gluten-free, grain-free, vegan, keto and paleo recipes. Being low-carb, high-protein and fibre-rich, it is very satiating.

Hemp flour doesn't rise, nor does it contain stretchy gluten, so it's often incorporated as part of a flour mixture, for example, you could replace 25 per cent of gluten-free or regular flour with hemp flour to increase the nutrition in a bread recipe.

Hemp protein powder is also made from ground hemp seeds after oil extraction but contains a higher percentage of protein, around 60 per cent.

It's a popular vegan protein booster before or after exercise. You can blend the powder into smoothies, sprinkle it on salads or add it to baking recipes; it's heartier than hemp flour.

Hemp milk

Hemp milk is a non-dairy option that is suitable for vegans. It's slightly thicker than cows' milk and tastes creamy, nutty and a little sweet. Hemp milk is more expensive than cows' milk, however there are easy instructions to make your own on the internet. Where there's milk there's cheese – hemp Parmesan is a popular salad and pasta topper for those who like a little plant-based zing.

PHOTOS: ISTOCK

HEMP OIL PERSONAL CARE

Hemp seed oil is being embraced by high-end Australian skincare brands because of its moisturising superpowers, anti-ageing benefits and sustainable production.

SOAP: Hemp seed oil soap is gentle and soothing for sensitive skin. It is believed to lock in the skin's natural moisture and balance the ph levels, keeping skin soft and supple and reducing the risk of acne. Hemp soap also has antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties which can help alleviate rashes and provide topical relief for eczema, psoriasis and dermatitis.

SKIN CREAM: Hemp seed oil is a valuable ingredient in creams used to moisturise the face and body because it restores the skin's natural barrier and hydrates without blocking pores. Its essential nutrients help regulate oil production, soften dry, irritated skin and soothe more intensive skin care conditions such as eczema. The omega fatty acids act as an anti-inflammatory, encouraging skin growth and new cell generation and combatting signs of aging.

BEARD OIL: For a bushier beard, those omega fatty acids in hemp beard oil help keep keratin healthy and beard hair strong and durable, reducing breakage. The oil also promotes better blood circulation, which allows hair follicles to become longer. If a bloke is forced get the razor out occasionally, hemp beard oil can be used after shaving to soothe and moisturise irritated skin.

CONDITIONER: Hemp seed oil is used in conditioner for all hair types, and being low allergenic, it doesn't cause irritation to sensitive scalps. It has softening and strengthening properties that help nourish dry, damaged and frizzy hair and improve shine and elasticity.

LIP BALM: Hemp infused lip balms are nourishing, soothing and hydrating for chapped lips as hemp seed oil deeply penetrates skin to moisturise and protect.

Some Australian hemp skincare brands to try:

Hemp Co	hempcoaustralia.com
Hemp Hemp Hooray	hemphemphooray.com.au
Hempworx	hempworx.com.au
Hey Bud Skincare	heybudskincare.com

NOTE: Hemp oil is low allergenic but if you have reactive skin, always try a patch test first.

Ready and willing

Established in 1971, the international WWOOF program allows organic farmers to share their home and experience with travellers willing to work and learn – it has been life-changing for many, writes **Simon Webster.**

PHOTOS: WWOOF AUSTRALIA

McHaley Ho, from Washington DC in the US, had no intention of WWOOFing when she came to Australia. The 21-year-old had just graduated from university and had time to spare after attending the Australian Open in Melbourne with her best friend, a tennis pro.

"I was looking to get outside my comfort zone and do something I had never done before," McHaley says.

"I looked into WWOOFing because I have always wondered what it takes to be self-sustainable and grow your own food. I'm fascinated by food, and I appreciate good, locally grown food, more than anyone I know."

McHaley signed up with WWOOF (Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms, formerly called Willing Workers on Organic Farms – see 'What is WWOOF' on page 76), spending 15 days at Namoorook Farm in Leongatha, Victoria.

"I learned a ton," she says. "Every day was different, but every morning started the same. I ate breakfast with my wonderful host, Neil, and afterwards I tended to the animals.

"From then on, I did whatever needed to be done. Some days that looked like turning over vegetable beds, and others looked like working with bees."

McHaley learned plenty of gardening skills, as well as cooking techniques and recipes.

"Neil was one of the most talented home chefs I have ever met," she says. "The food was one of the most incredible parts of the experience."

For anyone interested in WWOOFing, she has no hesitation in recommending it.

Facing page: During her stay at Leongatha, McHaley Ho from the US did whatever needed to be done and loved it – here she's extracting honey from honeycombs.

Left: McHaley soaking up some chook affection.

WHAT IS WWOOF?

WWOOF (Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms) is a volunteer exchange program. Volunteer workers, known as WWOOFers, provide four to six hours of farming or gardening per day in exchange for all their food and accommodation.

"We have hosts located all across Australia who use organic, biodynamic or permaculture techniques," says Tameson Linsen, the manager of WWOOF Australia.

Travellers can search for hosts on the WWOOF website.

"They contact the hosts that interest them," Linsen says. "They might be interested in bamboo. They might be interested in yoga. They might be interested in only going to hosts who are vegan. We have all these keywords people can search by.

"They contact the host and say: I'm coming through in a few weeks. This is a bit about me. Would you have room for me?"

The minimum is two nights and the average stay is one to two weeks, Linsen says. Some hosts want people to stay for three months.

WWOOFers might find themselves weeding, planting or propagating. They might help with bush regeneration, digging drainage ditches for flood mitigation, cleaning up for bushfire safety, making tinctures from a herb garden or harvesting and preserving food.

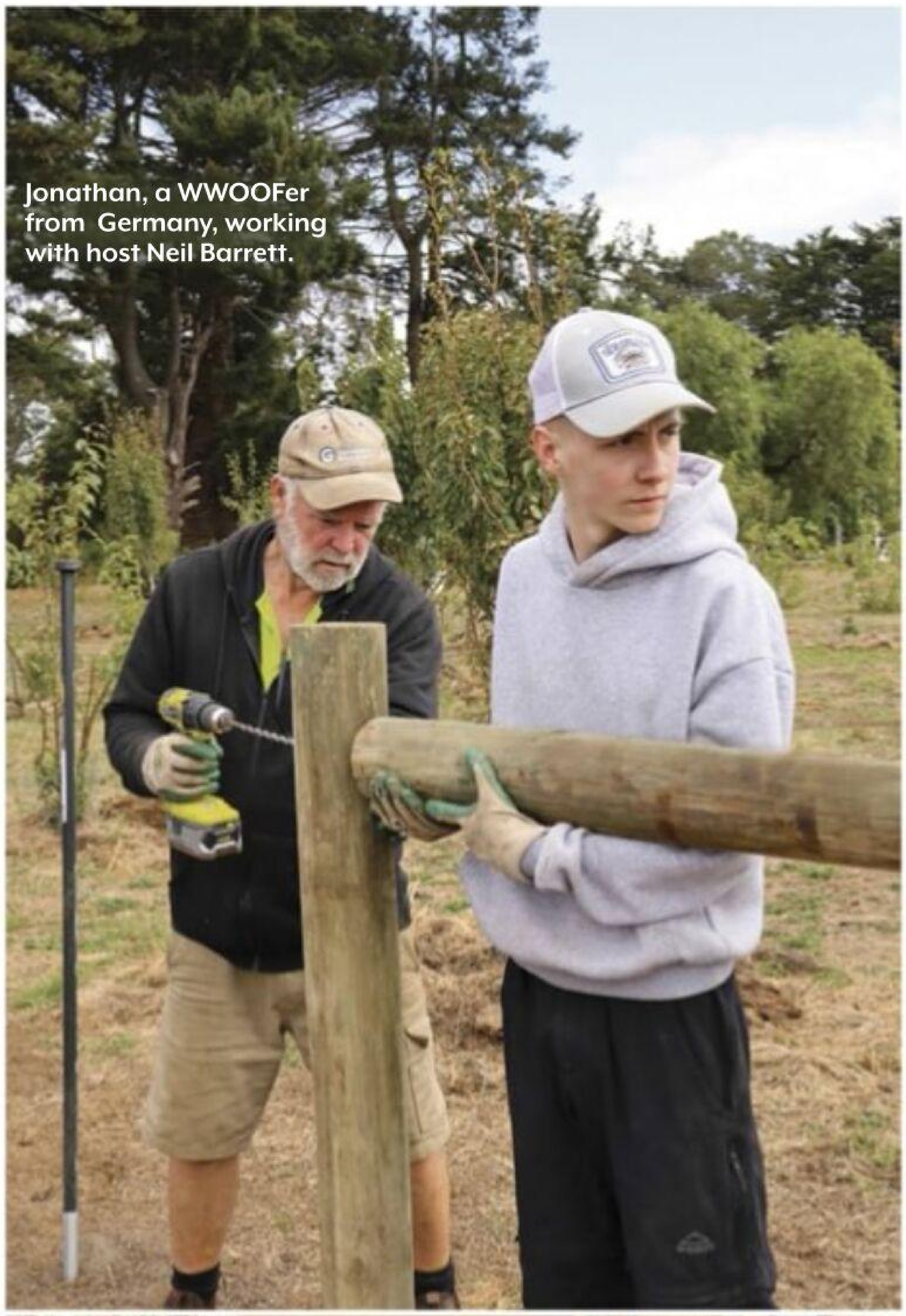
Launched in England in 1971 by a London-based secretary who wanted people to learn about organic farms and sustainability, WWOOF is now a global movement. The Aussie branch (established in 1981) has 4,500 WWOOFers travelling around the country, visiting about 800 hosts.

While most WWOOFers are international travellers, the organisation would like to see more Australians having a go, to improve their gardening skills.

"We're really encouraging people to WWOOF locally," Linsen says.

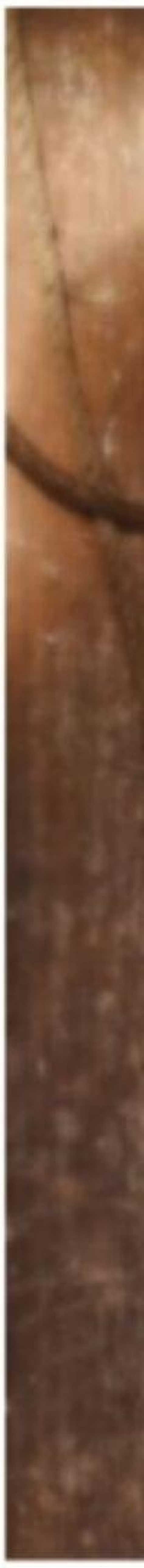
"A lot of people are getting back to grassroots with growing their own fruit and vegetables. By going out locally, even if it's just for a weekend, they can learn those skills."

> A one-year WWOOF membership costs $70 for one person or $120 for two people or a family travelling together. Host memberships cost $35–$70. For more information, visit: wwoof.com.au.



Jonathan, a WWOOFer from Germany, working with host Neil Barrett.

Jonathan feeding the chooks.



PHOTOS: SKYE LINSEN, WWOOF AUSTRALIA

Host Geraldine de Burgh-Day loves being self-sufficient and showing others how.

PHOTO: BRUCE HUTCHISON

"I would say make an educated decision about where you stay and go for it," McHaley says.

"The skills and experiences you will have will be one of a kind, and there is nothing like staying in someone's home. Being able to live a different pace and style of life was an absolute privilege.

"One piece of advice: video chat with your potential host before you commit. Ask them any and all questions you have. This will make you appear more serious and give you and the host a better idea of how you will fit into their life."

Learning experience

McHaley's host, Neil Barrett, is on his own learning journey. He quit his corporate life in the food services industry to move to his 30-hectare (75-acre) property in 2020, at the start of COVID.

"I really wanted to better understand the challenges of growing food in a sustainable way," he says. "It's hard work."

Neil has fruit, vegetables, chickens, beef cattle and dairy cows.

"I really wanted to understand if it was possible to become self-sufficient," he says. And he discovered that it was.

"By the ninth month I could have lived off what we had grown and raised."

Neil shares the work with his partner and WWOOFers, who come from all over the world and stay anything from one to six weeks.

"There's no shortage of to-do lists on the farm, and many hands make light work," he says. The work can be everything from feeding the animals to harvesting or planting in the garden.

"It's a great learning experience for both the host and the WWOOFer," Neil says. "I think there's enormous benefits that you can get out of the experience from both sides.

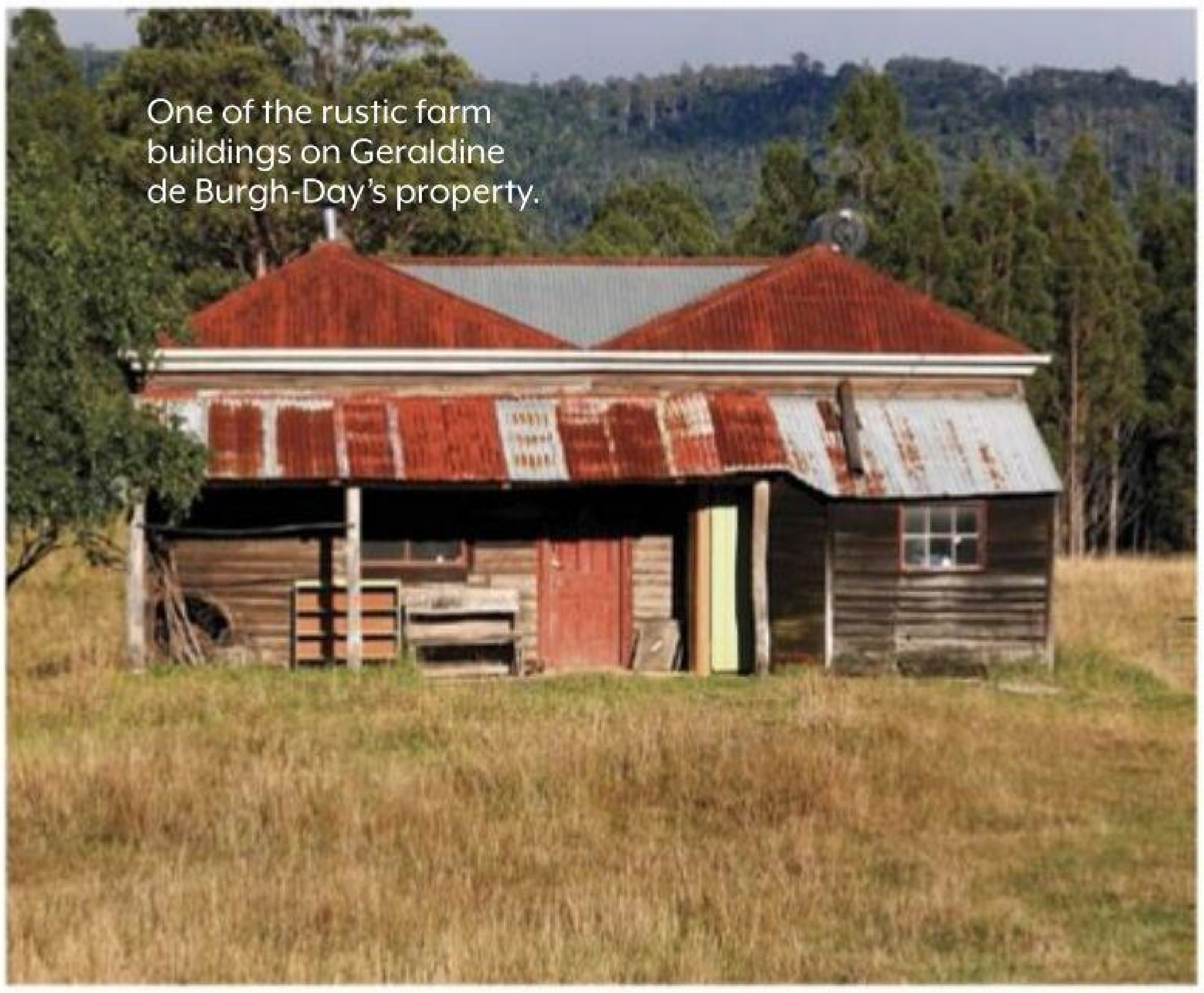
"You make connections with people you otherwise wouldn't meet. We're still connected with the first WWOOFer from three or four years ago. These are initially strangers that quite often become friends."

No supermarkets here

Geraldine de Burgh-Day says she gets "a lot of satisfaction showing people what is possible". And this self-sufficient, 79-year-old Tasmanian is definitely what you'd call a 'can-do' person.

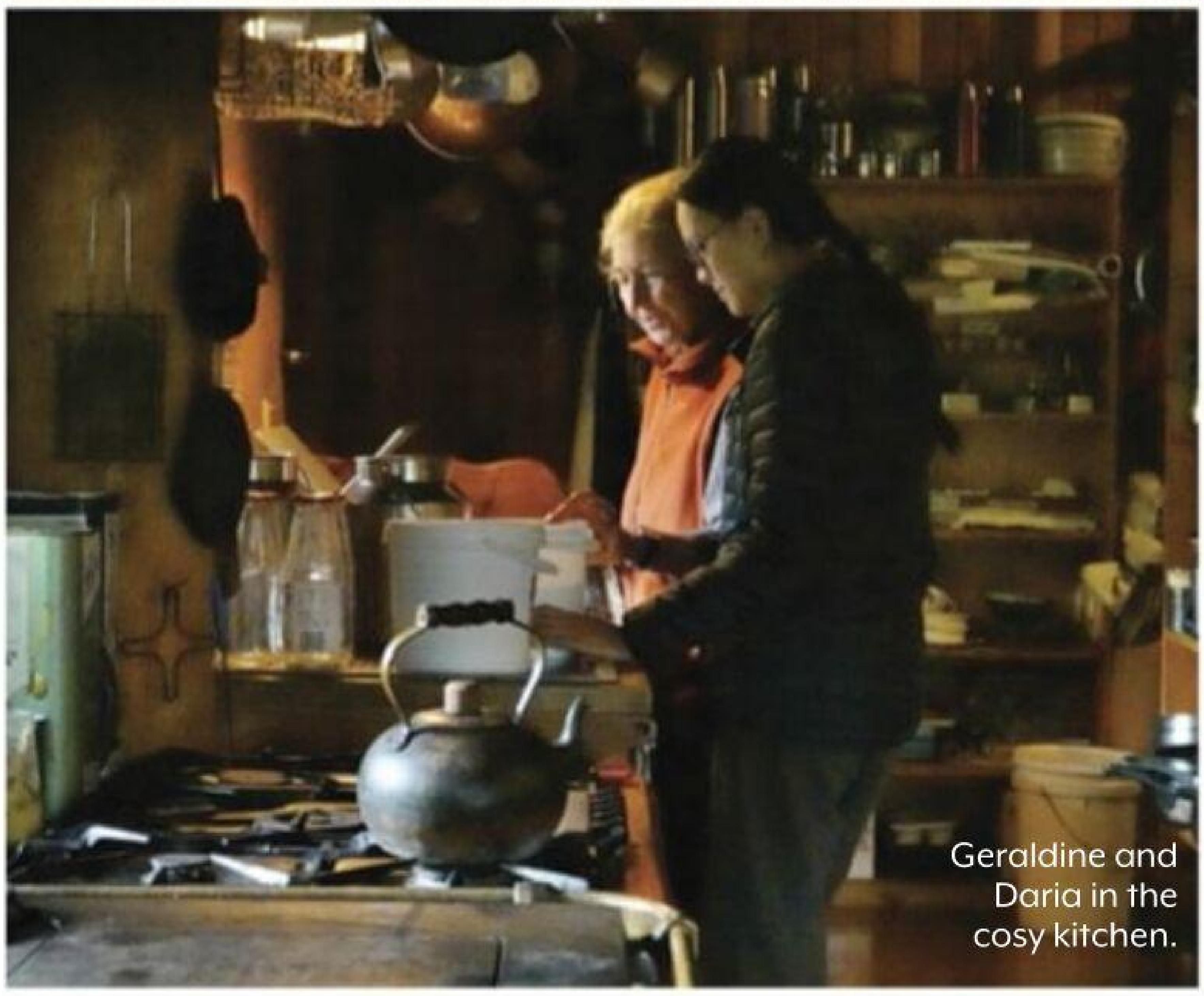
She has a big vegie patch and an orchard, milks her own dairy cows, makes cheese and butter, and raises beef cattle, which she kills and processes on the farm herself.

There's plenty to be done, and over the past 25 years she's had help from hundreds of WWOOFers.



One of the rustic farm buildings on Geraldine de Burgh-Day's property.

Geraldine shows WWOOFer Daria, from Singapore, through the garden.



Geraldine and Daria in the cosy kitchen.

"I'm a little bit selective," Geraldine says. "I only want to take people who are really interested in what I'm doing, because I'm pretty flat out."

In exchange for their labour, WWOOFers get an education in food growing, and often get sent away with a couple of packs of seeds at the end of their stay. The experience can change lives.

"I've had a remarkable number of people that have come and spent time with me, and they've gone away, and I've thought, I wonder if anything hit home there," Geraldine says. "A couple of years later, I suddenly get a photograph or an email out of the blue."

From the English nuclear physicist who moved to a remote part of the UK and grows his own vegies, to the visitor from Hong Kong who went home and set up a community garden, Geraldine's ex-WWOOFers have taken what they've learnt in this little community of Lorinna and spread it to all corners of the globe.

"I'm not claiming to be into permaculture or environmental this or that or anything else," Geraldine says. "I'm just about growing really healthy food with absolutely no nasty stuff, no chemicals at all. I've been certified organic for 25 years, and I'm absolutely passionate about that.

"I've not been to a supermarket for years – I don't go anywhere near those kinds of shops. I'm healthy, and I haven't got a doctor, because I eat good food."

Geraldine doesn't hold back when it comes to showing WWOOFers the reality of producing that food.

"I recently had two young girls that wanted to come for three days," Geraldine says. "I said, well, I'm cutting up a cow that I'm shooting next week, and I'll be boning it and packing it.

"One of them said she was a vegetarian. I said, well, that's the job. They opted to come, and the vegetarian put away some of the biggest steaks I've seen; she just loved them. She said: 'I'm very comfortable to eat meat when I know the history of the animal.' And I said to her, well, if, if I were out in the big, wide world, I probably wouldn't eat meat either."

Usually, Geraldine wants WWOOFers to stay longer.

"There's so much going on here," she says. "It takes a week of me slowing down to explain what's going on and also getting something of a reading of the individual: How interested are they? How responsible are they? Safety is really, really important."

Geraldine says sometimes it doesn't work out but generally it does. And she is all too happy to share her passion and skills.

"My generation has had a hell of a party on this planet," she says. "And I think we have an obligation to put a little bit back into the generation that's inheriting the mess. If I can do that – and it seems to be working with quite a lot of young people – I get a great deal of satisfaction. I show people that if they can imagine something, they can do it."

PHOTOS: BRUCE HUTCHISON

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A beautiful brew

Helen Cushing loves making herbal teas that are fresh and vibrant from the garden. Here are her favourites.

Every morning, I start the day by dropping a few leaves and petals into a teacup, pouring on boiling water and gazing momentarily into the steaming depths as colours and fragrance transform H_2O into tea. The brew then accompanies me to my yoga mat, where I sip the lovely blend as I progress from toe bending to sun salutations.

I call it prana tea, because it's fresh and vibrant, sparkling with a subtle energy that somehow connects me with gardens, freedom and all things good.

On the deck outside my kitchen are pots of herbs, including lemongrass, mints and calendula. At the bottom of the stairs to the garden are huge lemon verbena, lavender and rosemary bushes. I can reach them with my slippers on – important point.

Lemon balm grew as strong as a weed until the pademelons moved in. They love it as much as I do, so now it leads a sheltered life in my fortressed vegie patch. Fortunately, the paddies don't touch the stinging nettle, which suits me fine as it makes a deep-green, nutritious tea. Borage self-sows, offering delightful blue star flowers that brighten any herbal blend. Ditto heartsease.

The point being, that's how easy it is to grow and harvest herbal teas. You save money, reduce waste and protect yourself from incidental chemicals and microplastics that are in some tea bags, especially the fancy so-called 'silken' pyramids that are made of nylon or other plastics. Not to mention the superior flavours, smooth texture and satisfaction of your homegrown herbal cuppa experience. The leaves and petals are easily dried for use in the winter, when some herbs are dormant.

HERBAL HEROES

Almost any herb can be used for tea but some are real standouts. Here are my herbal tea heroes.

LEMONGRASS (*Cymbopogon citratus*)
I live in Hobart. Every year I divide my lemongrass, pot up the babies and give them away to amazed friends.

"I thought it was too cold to grow lemongrass here!" everyone says. Everyone is wrong.

My plant started from a piece out of a bunch I bought at an Asian grocery. I realised it had little root nodules at the base, so I planted it, and it grew happily on my sunny deck.

A single stem quickly multiplies into a clump in the growing season. Propagate in spring and summer and grow in full sun. Potted plants need repotting in spring to keep their vigour.

Harvest and dry enough leaves during the growing season to get you through the dark months. Chop them up into short lengths before drying.

In cooler climates lemongrass is dormant in winter. Do not cut back at this stage, as the dense clump of leaves protect the crown from frost damage.

PHOTO: ISTOCK

On the deck outside my kitchen are pots of herbs, including lemongrass, mints and calendula.

MINTS (*Mentha* spp.)
including lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*)
Mints are the herbal tea jackpot. Regular mint, peppermint, and yes, lemon balm which is basically a lemon-scented mint, although it's from the genus *Melissa*, while the others are *Mentha* spp.

They are vigorous perennials that die back in winter. The mints develop a stronger flavour in climates with greater temperature fluctuation, such as Tasmania.

Like the lemongrass, mint can be grown from the bunch you buy at the market, or from a friend's garden. Mint grows easily from cuttings or root runners in the growing season. Put cuttings straight into potting mix in a warm, shady place and keep it moist.

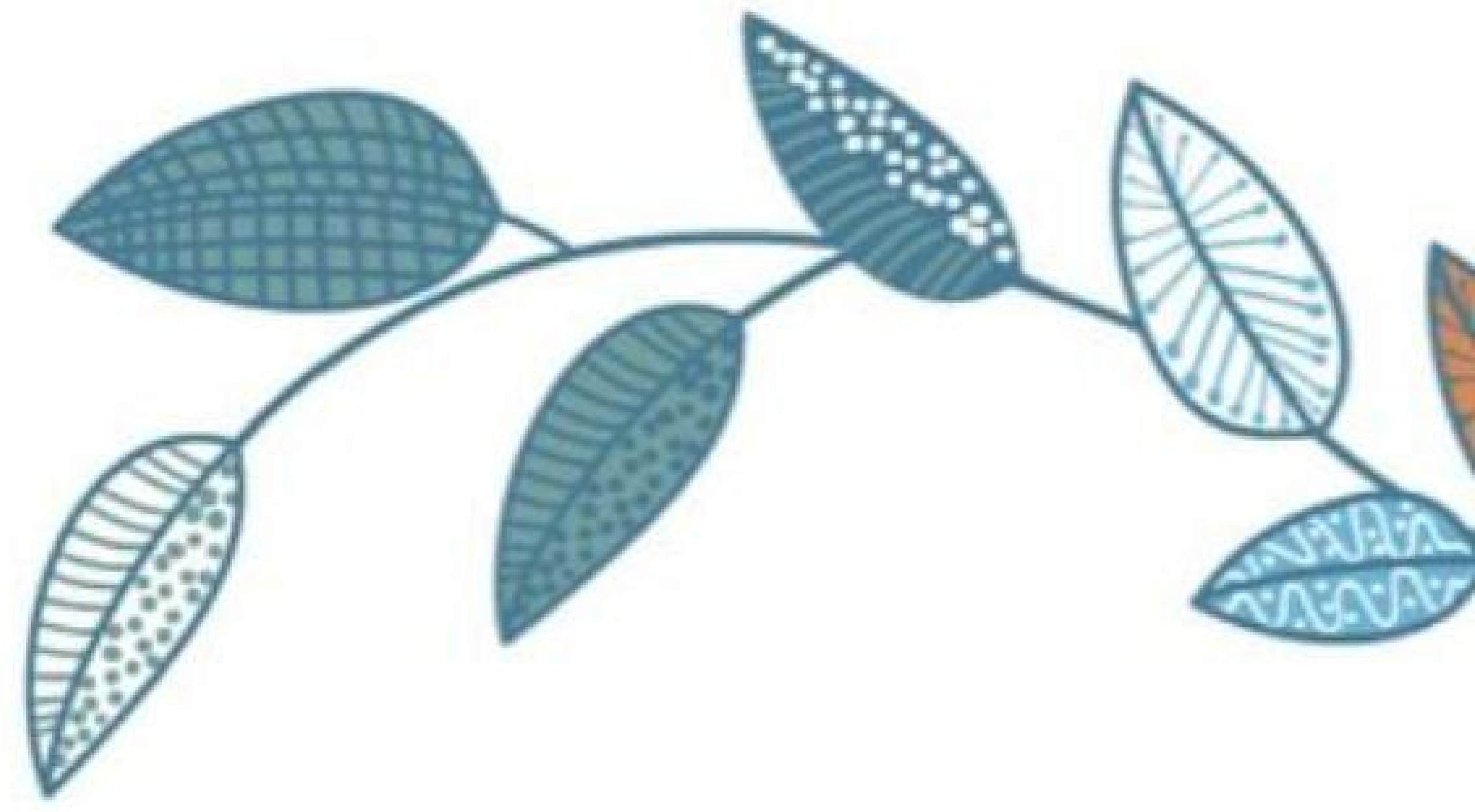
If conditions are favourable, the mints might take over your garden, so either contain them – pots are perfect – or plant where a lawn, wall or another barrier limits their spread.

Once established, provide plenty of water and shade from hot, afternoon sun.

Regular mint and lemon balm are delightful on their own or blended with other herbs, while peppermint dominates the flavour of any tea.

Peppermint keeps its flavour when dried, however lemon balm does not.

Top left: Dried lemongrass.
Left: Fresh lemongrass.
Above: Spearmint.
Above right: Lemon balm.



Left: Dried calendula flowers.

Below: Rosemary leaves and flowers.

Below left: Lemon verbena, flowers and dried leaves.

CALENDULA (*Calendula officinalis*)

Sometimes known as pot marigold, calendula is a cheerful orange or yellow daisy, commonly grown as an ornamental annual. It grows easily from seeds sown in spring and in many areas (including Hobart) calendula self-sows, returning year after year without being invasive. Note that it is not a true marigold (*Tagetes* spp.).

Calendula prefers a mild climate, thriving in pots or in the garden, loving sunshine, good soil and moisture for optimum growth. In hot climates it will die off in summer but in frost free areas it can be sown again in autumn to flower during winter.

The petals are used in herbal tea blends and as a colourful garnish. Petals dry well if removed from the flower head. Deadheading encourages more blooms but let some seed set to either collect for next season or allow self-seeding.

Calendula is often used in skin creams for its healing properties. The petals are rich in antioxidants.

LEMON VERBENA (*Aloysia triphylla*)

This herb is a star performer in the tea garden. Steep the fresh lanceolate leaves whole in your teapot or cup and add some mint and calendula petals for a cheerful mix.

It's a deciduous, woody shrub that loves a hard pruning in winter. Once established in a sunny position, lemon verbena is hardy through drought and frost. In subtropical-tropical climates it may retain its leaves all year.

Harvest as much as you like, it responds with more growth throughout spring and summer. Sprays of delicate, pinkish flowers grow at the end of branches. Snip off the flowers when cutting branches for drying as they leave lots of tiny dusty debris in the tea. Hang branches upside down, use racks or place in a paper bag to dry. Leaves can be removed before or after drying.

ROSEMARY (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)

You may have worn a sprig of rosemary on ANZAC and Remembrance Days to commemorate the tragic loss of life in war. Since ancient times rosemary has been associated with memory, and it grows wild on the Gallipoli peninsula in Türkiye where the ANZACs fought in World War I.

Rosemary is also a versatile culinary herb, but you may not have used it as a tea. Simply drop a sprig into your cup or teapot and add boiling water. It makes a refreshing drink with a lively, uplifting fragrance and flavour. Sometimes I pop a sprig into my water bottle – it adds a gentle, botanical hint, reminding me of gardens and sunshine.

Rosemary is a hardy, vigorous woody shrub that does best in full sun in a Mediterranean climate, that is warm, dry summers and cold winters. It doesn't love humidity so ensure it has good air flow and well-drained soil from Sydney north along the coast and sheltered valleys.

Rosemary responds well to frequent cutting, which keeps it compact. Otherwise it grows somewhat leggy and straggly. Bees love rosemary's blue flowers. It dries well, on or off the stem, storing well in an airtight jar.

But wait there's more...

There is a diverse range of edible and fragrant plants that make excellent herbal teas. Here are some more to try:

- **Chamomile** is a classic. This herb needs a cool climate for growing. The so-called German chamomile is the best one for tea.
- **Lavender flowers** add a soft fragrance, including to regular black tea.
- **Lemon and Thai basil** can be used to make a classic iced tea with a spicy twist.
- **Use fennel** leaves and seeds for an aniseed flavour.

Infuse in a glass teapot to show the beauty of herbal tea blends, particularly when adding colourful petals.

PHOTOS & ILLUSTRATIONS: ISTOCK

Podcasts you'll dig

Podcasts have boomed over the past decade, becoming a favourite medium for entertainment, education and inspiration. **Phil Dudman** explores some top Aussie gardening offerings.

Deryn Thorpe and Steve Wood.

Madeleine Gasparinatos and Emily Allen.

With over five million podcasts globally and 70 million episodes to choose from, there's surely something for everyone. For gardeners, podcasts are a great way to mix a love of plants with interesting stories and expert advice.

Whether you're tuning in on the way to work or enjoying them during those long, satisfying hours in the vegie patch, podcasts can be the perfect company. Here in Australia, we're lucky to have a good selection of gardening podcasts covering all sorts of local topics.

ALL THE DIRT

Horticulturists Steve Wood and Deryn Thorpe bring decades of experience in gardening, sustainability and environmental know-how to their hugely popular podcast produced in Western Australia. With their warm, approachable style, they dive into fascinating chats with horticulturists, soil gurus and ecologists, sharing insights that inspire gardeners of all levels. Regular episodes are packed with seasonal tips, practical advice, and interviews with top gardening and industry experts from Australia and beyond.

> **allthedirt.com.au/podcast**

AVANT GARDENERS

Hosted by Emily Allen and Madeleine Gasparinatos, this podcast is for anyone who loves gardening (or wants to learn)! As self-confessed beginners, they chat with gardening pros about everything from tips and tricks to their gardening fails, all with a drink in hand. Recorded in the beautiful Huon Valley in southern Tasmania, each episode is packed with enthusiasm, laughs and insightful conversations.

> **avant-gardeners.com**

BRANCH OUT

Produced by the Botanic Gardens of Sydney, this podcast takes you deep into the fascinating world of plants. Host Vanessa Fuchs teams up with experts like astronauts, botanists, neuroscientists, and winemakers to share stories that'll leave you in awe of the plant kingdom. It's science, storytelling, and a touch of magic rolled into one!

> **botanicgardens.org.au**

Left: Chloe Foster, Emma Herd, Virginia Heywood and Chloe Thomson.

3CR GARDENING SHOW

This podcast brings you the much-loved 3CR Sunday gardening show from Melbourne, hosted by Emma Herd, Virginia Heywood, Chloe Foster and Chloe Thomson. With regular expert guests like Stephen Ryan, Penny Woodward and AB Bishop it offers a vibrant mix of practical advice, local gardening news, and eco-friendly ideas as the team dives deep into all things horticultural from the Garden State and around Australia.

> **3cr.org.au/gardening**

THE DIGGERS CLUB

If you're a gardener who loves to challenge the norm, this podcast is for you! Hosted by Melbourne horticulturist and broadcaster Chloe Foster, it explores unconventional and sometimes controversial gardening ideas. In their debut series, Chloe dives deep into the pros and cons of the iconic Eucalypt, chatting with experts in ecology, sustainability and design.

> **diggers.com.au**

HERB YOUR ENTHUSIASM

Calling all garden nerds! Hosted by Sam Beckford from Perth, this podcast dives into gardening adventures such as edible landscaping, permaculture, and rewilding. Sam chats with big names like Charles Dowding, Hannah Maloney and Costa Georgiadis, sharing their tips and uncovering what fuels their passion for all things green and growing.

> **instagram.com/herbyourenthusiasmpod**

MUDDY BOOTS

Landscape designer Keith Edwards and 'Garden Girl', Elisabeth Kingman, join forces to share their garden design inspiration, seasonal tips and hands-on advice. This fun, informative podcast offers practical gardening knowledge and plenty of laughs to help you create your dream outdoor space.

> **muddyboots.net.au**

PLANTS GROW HERE

A podcast tailored for professionals and enthusiasts in the garden industry. Hosted by horticulturist Daniel Fuller, the show delves into horticultural, ecological and landscape gardening topics. With over 200 episodes, it features interviews with experts and industry professionals, covering subjects like plant selection, urban ecology and sustainable practices.

> **plantsgrowhere.com**

PRACTICAL PERMACULTURE

Hosted by Alysse Gallagher and Jo Flintham, this podcast follows their permaculture journey with lots of laughs, a little swearing, and practical tips for gardeners at any level. They're no experts – just two friends learning as they go – and invite you to join them in exploring how permaculture principles shape their gardens and lifestyle.

> **instagram.com/practical_permaculture**

ROOTS AND SHOOTS

Sabrina Hahn's gardening program is perfect for both green thumbs and those just starting out. Hilarious and full of gardening wisdom, Sabrina answers all your questions, big or small. This fun, informative podcast is taken from her popular Saturday talkback program on ABC Radio Perth, where she makes gardening entertaining for everyone!

> **abc.net.au/listen/programs/rootsandshoots**

FOWL PLAY

In this podcast, Jackie McLeish and Laura Bergmann offer a fun and down-to-earth take on small-scale farming and backyard gardening. Each episode, they share their experiences and practical tips on raising poultry, gardening techniques, and sustainable practices, with expert guests and plenty of laughs.

> **anchor.fm/fowlplaypodcast**

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Download the ABC Listen app and add your ABC gardening programs to 'Your Listen' or head to your preferred podcast platform like Podbean, Apple Podcasts, Spotify or YouTube. Use the search bar to explore the name of the podcast or general topics like gardening, horticulture or sustainable farming. Happy listening!

BACKGROUND PHOTOS: ISTOCK

Skateboards and feathers

Celebrity chook lady Elaine Janes recently lost her much-loved skateboarding rooster, Squiggles, prompting **Steve Payne** to ask about their special connection.

I've been fascinated with Elaine's story since we ran an article about her a few years ago in Issue 134, and then I wrote about her in my editorial a few issues ago (OG 153). For those who missed the original, we featured photos of Elaine and her feathered friends out and about – getting a coffee, catching a surf break or riding a skateboard. But I'd always wanted to know more about how she trains them.

Elaine wrote to me recently to say her much-loved skateboard-riding rooster Squiggles had passed away. This sad news prompted me to ask why she first trained him to ride and how it changed his nature.

Elaine says for all chooks and roosters, life at her place begins by tucking them under her strong left arm. Elaine says this tells the chook 'she is the mum' and in charge, but also full of love and support. Even the wildest roosters melt under her arm, she says.

Next, Elaine seeks direct eye contact, even if she has to turn their head her way, and tells them the life they will be coming into – which from what I can tell, is pretty damn good and more exciting than most.

The story of Squiggles, who Elaine is still grieving, reveals how her chook connections work.

True feathered friends

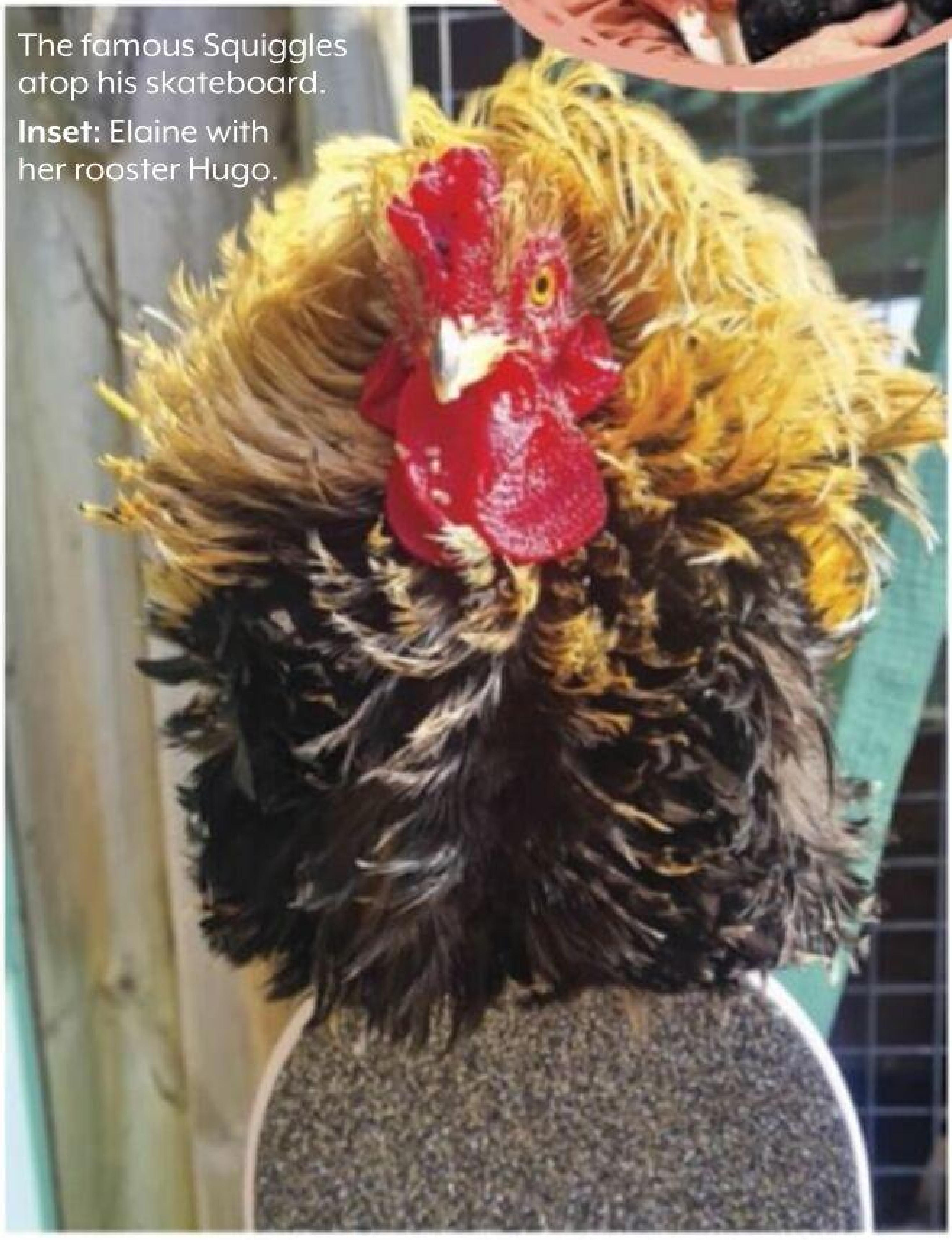
"Sadness overwhelms me as I write this little story of Squiggles who arrived as a Frissle rescue rooster four years ago. He was as wild as a rooster could be, he could also look cute with his intense facial expressions and his multi-coloured feathers," Elaine says.

"After two months of coping with his outrageous behaviour, the time had come to do something.

"I made a decision to harness his uncontrolled energy and teach him to skate. His lesson time was five minutes a day and no distractions. My voice and facial expressions also played a part in his training. Time passed, and I was elated with his progress. We were soon out on footpaths and general skating areas."

Elaine says he could be distracted by bushy scrub, so she solved this by taking him to a nearby skating bowl.

"He looked fearless, and all this changed his attitude on life. He was now an important rooster and he could perch on the end of his board for hours and be able to look over everybody else. And I loved him for his skill and his perfect behaviour when we were out. Squiggles was also a good watchdog and if anything strange appeared on our territory he gave the warnings. He was the only rooster that showed his emotions and had to snuggle under my chin, or ear, close was never close enough. No one will ever replace him, he was a mummy's boy!"



The famous Squiggles atop his skateboard.
Inset: Elaine with her rooster Hugo.

But it was a rescue chook named Flapper who began the whole chook outing experiment. Elaine had found Flapper and another bedraggled chook wandering down her road. She brought them inside and had an instant connection. Elaine decided to try Flapper out on a car journey through a noisy car wash. She didn't budge or squawk. So Elaine started taking her to cafes, beaches and parks, and her quiet confidence drew people and conversation. She became a celebrity locally and in the media. She was even toilet-trained, which is handy at cafes.

There is so much more to the story of Elaine's love for her chooks and roosters, and how they transformed her life, as told in her sweet book *Under My Wing*. But the whisper is, there is something bigger on the horizon.

PHOTOS: ELAINE JANES

Chooks may ingest intestinal worm eggs while foraging.

PHOTO: JESSAMY MILLER

Pesky poultry worms
and the truth about treatment

Intestinal worms have inspired more myths than any other aspect of backyard poultry keeping. **Jessamy Miller** sets the records straight on appropriate treatments.

Chicken worming is a surprisingly contested area, so it is worth knowing more about these annoying opportunists so you can tell the fact from the many myths when it comes to treatment.

Parasitic worms, or helminths, burrow inside a chicken's gastrointestinal tract, damaging the gut lining, interfering with their ability to absorb nutrients and ultimately affecting health and egg quality.

Adult birds generally develop a level of resistance to worms, but young birds or those with lowered immune systems are more susceptible. Severe infestations can lead to death. Infestation occurs when birds pick up worm eggs from litter, soil or droppings. These hatch in the intestines, mature, and lay their own eggs, which are excreted in manure, continuing the cycle.

Some worms require intermediate hosts, such as insects, to complete their life cycle and poultry become infected when they eat these hosts.

Garlic in water will help boost poultry immune systems.

Symptoms

The symptoms of worms include: slow growth, reduced appetite, weight loss, tatty feathers, depression, diarrhoea, reduced egg production and a pale comb. Worms or their segments may appear in droppings, and occasionally pass into the reproductive system and become enclosed in an egg; a nasty surprise.

These general symptoms are common to many poultry diseases so, unsurprisingly, the first treatment for a sick hen is often to worm it. However, without a veterinary diagnosis, this isn't the best option.

Proprietary de-wormers generally only target one or two worm types; without knowing which the bird has, the remedy may be ineffective. Additionally, wormers are purgatives and taking them can lower hens' vitality. If the chook is suffering from a disease instead, a de-wormer will significantly stress her system and may impact recovery.

Worming the flock seasonally is not recommended; this leads to widespread resistance and may render the treatment ineffective when really needed.

Diagnosis

To ascertain which worms are affecting your flock, if any, you will need to supply fecal samples to a vet or laboratory to be tested. The lab I use charges $45 a mail-in test, but prices will vary.

Proprietary products

Proprietary de-worming is best performed under veterinary authority. There are only a few registered anthelmintics so vets may recommend off-label products, which may not have established withholding periods for eggs. If in doubt, wait two weeks after worming before consuming eggs.

This is particularly recommended where babies and children are concerned.

COMMON POULTRY WORMS

Large roundworm: White worm, 5–12cm long, that burrows into the small intestine walls. Eggs can remain dormant in damp soil for 4 months. Most chooks carry a small number of roundworms without undue harm.

Tapeworm species: Range in size from 5–15cm in length and are segmented. Tapeworms attach to the upper and middle walls of the small intestine. Eggs form in the segments which break off and are passed out. Tapeworms require intermediate hosts, such as snails, house flies or beetles.

Hairworm: Long thread-like worms found in the oesophagus, crop or upper small intestine. Eggs are passed out in droppings and ingested by a host like an earthworm. When the earthworm is eaten the parasite is released into the fowl's gut.

Caecal worm: A small worm, 0.7–1.5cm long, which lives in the caecum. Eggs are passed out with the droppings and in the ideal environment take 2 weeks to become infective. Fowls may eat the eggs directly or via hosts like earthworms.

PHOTO: JESSAMY MILLER

Worm testing

Go through your local vet. Alternatively, fecal egg count tests are available via post from:

- Parasite Diagnostic Services: parasite.com.au
- NSW Department of Primary Industries: dpi.nsw.gov.au/about-us/services/laboratory-services/veterinary/parasitology-testing

Keeping chooks inside in dry conditions will help break the worm cycle.

Dry is healthy

Management can be tailored to disrupt the worms' life cycle and provide an environment where they don't thrive. Worm eggs need warm, moist conditions to survive in soil. They proliferate in overcrowded poultry set-ups where birds are stressed and nutrition isn't top-notch. Providing dry spacious housing and a covered yard means parasites won't access enough moisture to complete their life cycle, while litter over an impermeable floor can prevent eggs reaching soil. Hot dry summers are effective in dying out worm eggs and rendering them void, one small benefit. Resting or spelling range areas for extended periods also helps break the cycle.

A well balanced ration will keep birds in top condition for superior resistance. Earthworms, flies, earwigs, slugs, snails and beetles may all be hosts so it's a much better idea to feed them to your ducks, who are less susceptible to worms than chickens.

Registered poultry anthelmintics include levamisole (Kilverm) and piperazine for use against roundworm. Levamisole is also licensed for caecal worm and hairworm. Flubendazole, recently licensed in Australia, is a broad spectrum anthelmintic, effective against most worm types. Ivermectin, moxidectin (Moxivet) and praziquantel (Avitrol Plus) may have tapeworm-control capabilities, but are unregistered for food-producing birds like fowls, so health impacts and withholding period are not established. Ivermectin use has been associated with reduced fertility in roosters.

How to use

Poultry de-wormers are generally administered in water. Avoid choosing a very hot day in case fowls dislike the taste and refuse to drink, or are tempted to drink too much. The procedure is to withhold water for two hours, then offer the medicine in clean water for a set time period. Repeat two weeks later if specified.

After treatment, it's essential to clean out and replace litter or topsoil from housing to avoid reinfection. Do this within 24 hours of treatment.

Natural treatments

For organic growers, natural suggestions commonly include: pawpaw/papaya, pumpkin seeds, wormwood, diatomaceous earth, grated carrot, chilli, garlic and apple cider vinegar (ACV). However, research supporting these is scanty, and the CSIRO found many alternative de-wormers totally ineffective (Groves 2020). Effects of plant-based remedies are notoriously hard to replicate as the amount of active ingredient will vary widely in different varieties, soil types, seasons and countries. Where they have worked, preparation needs to be identical to the original study.

- A 2023 study found reduced worms from a treatment of 50 per cent pawpaw seeds and 50 per cent pumpkin seeds, air-dried, ground and pelleted without water.
- Wormwood and pumpkin seed reduced the negative health effects from roundworm, but showed no anti-worming effect.
- Diatomaceous earth has been found effective against external parasites, but had little effect on internal parasites.
- Chilli and carrot have no effect as wormers, unsurprising when they are staple foods in countries where intestinal parasites remain a leading cause of death.

Overall health

A strong immune system will help prevent worms proliferating to harmful levels and two established natural health boosters are garlic and ACV. Recommended dosage for garlic is two cloves crushed and added to poultry water for 2–3 days a month. Garlic must be raw and fresh; heat treating destroys the active ingredient. For ACV, use 1 teaspoon to 1 litre water offered 2–3 days a month.

While there is a lack of simple, effective alternatives to anthelmintics for organic systems, good management remains an effective strategy for combatting worm infestations.

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- CSIRO study: publish.csiro.au/an/fulltext/AN19693
- Pumpkin and pawpaw study: https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1755-1315/1208/1/012057/pdf
- Wormwood and pumpkin seed study: poultryworld.net/specials/phytogenics-against-roundworms-in-laying-hens/

PHOTO: ISTOCK

Cucumber trauma

Simon Webster has grown a bumper crop of cucumbers, but can he get anyone to eat them?

I've had a bit of an issue with bitter cucumbers. And I've got some fairly bitter family members, too, after I've been trying to force them to eat these cucumbers for the past month.

To say Mrs Plot and the kids are traumatised would be over-egging the mayonnaise a bit, but they are definitely showing signs of cucumber phobia. They peek beneath the top slice of bread before biting a sandwich, and sift through salads forensically, with brows furrowed deep with suspicion – quite rightly, as I usually try to sneak some in there.

It's just typical, isn't it. You get a bumper crop of something and it turns out to be inedible. Grow something nice, like a big, juicy tomato, and you only get one of them, before the plant keels over, leaf on brow, exhausted by the effort.

I planted these cucumbers out as seedlings; they grew like the clappers and set fruit straightaway. It seemed like one day there were flowers, and the next there were these huge, fat white submarines all over the place.

You should have seen the excitement on everyone's faces as they saw me walk in with an armful. And you should have seen the grimaces after they'd tasted one. Funnily enough, I'm sure I heard Mrs Plot call me an "armful". Or something like that.

Apparently, the culprit is cucurbitacin, a compound that moves into the fruit from the leaves and stem when the plant is stressed. Lack of water is the most common cause.

The thing is, they were bitter from the very first crop – and as the growth period only seemed to last about five minutes, I don't think there was enough time to get stressed about anything.

I've tried all sorts to make them palatable. I've peeled the skin off, but it only led to a marginal improvement. I've chopped the ends off and then peeled the skin off (thank you, internet tip, but the only benefit was having slightly less cucumber to eat). And I have salted the bejesus out of them (somewhat effective, but not that sustainable from a health point of view).

Perhaps it's just the variety, I started thinking. Though I'm fairly confident I've grown 'Cucumburus humungus fattus whitus submarinus' before with no such issues.

Then, last week, a tip from a friend: try harvesting them early. You know: when they're a bit less humungus and fattus and a bit more smallus and skinnyus. Get them before the seeds are full-sized, he said, with that wink that expert gardeners do. You know the one.

So, out I went, and grabbed a small cucumber – one that previously I would have considered underdone.

I took a bite. And it was OK. Not exactly a taste sensation. But better than bitter.

So I've started picking them earlier. Trouble is, getting the family to trust cucumbers again is proving to be a challenge.

They're scarred. They won't even try them, despite my endorsements. I even tried the gardening expert's wink, but everyone just looked at me funny.

Might have to start sneaking them into smoothies and work up from there.

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